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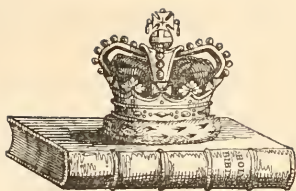
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HONOUR ALL MEN: LOVE THE BROTHERHOOD: FEAR GOD:
HONOUR THE KING.

1 Pet. ii. 17.

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In the mean time, the Editor requests the attention of the Public to the WORK, of which the title is announced in the last page of the preceding Advertisements;—a work, which may be considered no unfit COMPANION of *that* to which its patronage has been already extended.

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THOMAS NEWTON, D. D.

LORD BISHOP OF BRISTOL, AND DEAN OF ST. PAUL'S.

From his Works, published in 1787. 8vo. 6 Vols. Second Edition.

THE bench of English Bishops may justly number the eminent prelate, whose name stands above, among its brightest ornaments. His services, not less to the cause of literature in general than to his profession in particular, were on all occasions opportune and substantial ;—at the same time that they were adorned and upheld by a purity of life and suavity of manners than which nothing could have been more exemplary. The two great works by which Bishop Newton's name will more decidedly go down to posterity, are, his *Dissertation on the Prophecies*, and his edition of the *Poetical Works of Milton* : the latter, a master-piece of its kind ; and first appearing in 1749, in two splendid quarto volumes. This first publication contained only the *Paradise Lost*. In due time (1752) it was succeeded by the *Paradise Regained* and the *Minor Poems*, in one quarto volume. This was not only the first regular *Variorum* edition of Milton's poetical works, — enriched with much choice information from Warburton, Jortin, Pearce, and others, — but embodying all that was valuable in previous annotators, including the Essays of Addison. It was also adorned by engravings, from the designs of no very despicable master ; for *Hayman*, who was

the Stoddart of his day, now and then presents us with a striking representation of the thoughts of the poet. Lord Bath, the Bishop's patron, was at the expense of the engravings; and such was the success of this happy union of learning and art, that the editor lived to see *eight* impressions of his labours. The work was also well got up in other respects. The paper and printing were excellent; and the correctness of the text was such, that *Baskerville* was induced to lend the magic of his press to contribute to its celebrity. His edition of the text only, in two small quarto volumes, is one of the most beautiful efforts of his typographical skill.

Bishop Newton's fame is inseparable from this admirable performance. It is as much superior to Warburton's *Variorum* edition of Pope, as is that of Stevens's *Shakspeare* to all that preceded it. Mr. Todd has, doubtless, enlarged the sphere of intelligence connected with the illustration of Milton's text, by a crowd of apposite authorities, and by most curious and felicitous research; but the previous labours of our Bishop can at no time become obsolete. For half a century there was no similar work comparable with it. In the indulgence of these expressions I may be influenced by the force of early habits and reminiscences. The works of Milton and Pope, edited by Bishops Newton and Warburton, were among my first book-acquisitions on entering a college-life at Oxford; and I read both works with an intensity of interest and delight which it were now difficult to describe; sometimes even through the night, till morn

“ Walk'd o'er the eastern hills in amice grey.”

“ But these are “flying words.” Bishop Newton's *Dissertation on the Prophecies* — the “magnum opus” of his professional labours — was first published in 1754, 8vo.; since which it has re-appeared in a variety of forms, with more or less critical aid, down to the present day. It has now the sanction of time — confirmative of its being *INDISPENSABLE* to the library of a clergyman. Its learned and amiable author survived the

publication nearly thirty years, dying in 1782, in the 78th year of his age. In the specimens of his sermons here selected, the first has been chosen with reference chiefly to the PRESENT PERIOD of the British public. It was preached before George III. on his accession to the crown of these realms; and it is now reprinted on the eve of the coronation of his son, William IV. The sermons of Bishop Newton are comparatively few, and chiefly on occasional subjects; as, indeed, *both* the ensuing will testify. His "Dissertations," however, have the character of sermons, and are, many of them, of admirable force and tendency.

GOD AND THE KING *

1 PET. ii. 17.

Fear God ; honour the King.

IT hath been observed, and a very just observation it is, that there is a concatenation of the virtues as well as of the vices ; that they are linked as it were together, and one draweth on and inferreth another. Our Saviour himself hath in effect asserted the same thing, in saying (*Matt. xxii. 40.*) that “ on the two great commandments,” the love of God and the love of our neighbour, “ hang all the law and the prophets.” But some virtues have a nearer relation and connection than others, are more closely and intimately united, and one floweth naturally and almost necessarily from another. Of this kind are the two precepts which St. Peter hath joined together, “ Fear God ; honour the king.”

Religion and government are the two main pillars which support the world. Without them there would be nothing but anarchy, and confusion, and every evil work. Take down the one and you weaken the other ; they must both stand or fall

* Preached before the King on the day of his accession, 1761.

together. For which reason St. Peter hath fitly joined together the two precepts of “fearing God and honouring the king.” They are great and important duties when considered separately; they are of greater force and efficacy when taken conjointly; and the former is the proper foundation and support of the latter. For it will ever be found true, that they who have the justest sense of their duty to God, are most loyal and obedient to the king. The best men and Christians always make the best citizens and subjects.

When St. Peter united the two precepts of “fearing God and honouring the king,” as he could mean to represent only the true God, not any idols or false gods, as the proper object of our *fear*; so he designed to recommend only a just and lawful prince, not a lawless tyrant, as a character deserving of our *honour*. “An idol,” as St. Paul saith, (1 *Cor.* vii. 4.) “is nothing in the world,” and, instead of being made an object of worship, ought rather to be treated with contempt. A tyrant is worse than nothing, and so far from deserving honour, that he is more justly entitled to hatred and abhorrence. As it is only the true God that we are to *fear* and *worship*; so it is only a just and lawful prince that we are to *honour* and *obey*: and these, if considered separately, are great and important duties in themselves.

The “fear of God” is not a superstitious horror, but a religious veneration of his divine majesty, to live always as in his presence, to reverence his holy

name and his word, to stand in awe and sin not, to regard nothing so much as his favour, to dread nothing so much as his displeasure : and who can reflect upon the greatness of God and the littleness of man, and not tremble before him ? Every attribute almost of the Deity may properly excite and work upon our fear. We are naturally under some awe and apprehension when we come before our earthly superiors ; but we are at all times in the more immediate presence of the great God of heaven and earth. No man can consider and compare together his omnipotence with our imbecility and weakness, his omniscience with our frailty and ignorance, his purity and perfection with our sins and wickedness, and not be ready to profess with holy Job (xxiii. 15.), “ Therefore am I troubled at his presence ; when I consider, I am afraid of him.” The very goodness of God will make all ingenuous natures fearful of offending him, according to that of the psalmist (*Psal.* cxxx. 4.), “ There is forgiveness with thee that thou mayest be feared.” Not one adequate object of our fear can be found if not the righteous governor of the world, our inspector here, and our judge hereafter. (*Luke*, xii. 4, 5.) “ Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that, have no more that they can do ; but I will forewarn you whom you shall fear,” saith our Saviour ; “ fear him which, after he hath killed, hath power to cast into hell ; yea, I say unto you, Fear him.”

As “ the fear of God ” includeth several duties,

so likewise doth "the honour of the king," and extendeth to all civil magistrates, not only "unto the king as supreme," (1 *Pet.* ii. 13, 14.) but likewise "unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evil doers, and for the praise of them that do well." Society cannot subsist without regularity and order, without some to govern and some to obey. A fit disposition and subordination of the parts is as necessary in the body politic as in the natural body; and the hand and the foot can ill perform their functions without the head to direct and the eye to oversee. Not only the peace and harmony of society will be spoiled for want of subordination, but discord and confusion and misery will ensue. For his own private interest therefore, as well as for the public emolument, a man should pay all due honour to the higher powers; and commonly they who are the first to violate order are the first to suffer for it. Every society hath armed the magistrate with force sufficient to chastise such insolent offenders; and not only they, but often their friends and families, are involved in the fatal consequences of their disobedience. Honour is due to all inferior magistrates, and much more to the superior, for the benefits which redound from good government. Gratitude as well as duty requires it at our hands; and he must be not only a bad citizen, but a bad man, who can refuse it.

So great, important, and necessary are these duties when considered separately; but they are of

much greater force and efficacy when taken conjointly, and reciprocally confirm and strengthen each other. Religion and loyalty go best hand in hand together. The fear of God enforceth obedience to the laws; and obedience to the laws promoteth the fear of God. True religion is the best support of good government; and good government maintains and encourages true religion. So that it is no visionary scheme, but there is a real foundation, in the nature of things for the alliance and union between Church and State; and what God and the constitution of things have thus joined together, let not men impiously pretend to put asunder.

If we would attain any just conception of the ways and means whereby civil policy contributes to the promotion of true religion, we cannot form our notions upon any constitution better than our own, especially as we see it happily administered at present. The king or, to speak more generally, the civil magistrate protects and defends the church from injury and violence, of professed enemies without, and of false brethren within. He not only protects and defends the church from danger, but also provides for her support and maintenance by a public endowment for her ministers; so that, according to the prediction of the evangelical prophet, (*Isa. xlix. 23.*) “kings are” properly “her nursing-fathers, and queens her nursing-mothers.” He allows to the heads and governors of the church a seat in the court of legislature and supreme judicature of the kingdom, to sit there as watchmen and

guardians, to see that nothing be enacted or adjudged contrary to the interests of the church and religion. He permits the exercise of ecclesiastical jurisdiction with coercive powers for the reformation of manners, to supply the deficiencies of civil judicatures, and ratifies and enforces spiritual censures by temporal penalties. He farther promotes the fear of God and a sense of religion by punishing impiety and profaneness, vice and immorality, more especially such as is opposite to or destructive of good government (*Rom. xiii. 4.*); “for he beareth not the sword in vain, and is a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil.” He not only discountenances and punishes the bad, but also rewards and encourages the good, and manifests himself to be “sent” (*1 Pet. ii. 14.*) as for the punishment of “evil doers,” so likewise “for the praise of them that do well.” But a good magistrate, a good king, no way promotes religion and virtue more effectually than by his own example. They who resist all other motives, will yet have some regard to royal example. It is of greater force than the dead letter of statutes. It is a living law to the whole nation. Happy are the people who can look up to the throne for a pattern of goodness, and experimentally find and feel the first in rank to be the first also in virtue.

Such influence hath the state upon religion, but religion operates more strongly upon the state, and “the fear of God” is the best foundation and support of “the honour of the king.” Religion would be required of us, even if we lived without govern-

ment or society ; but no government or society can tolerably subsist without religion. A nation of atheists would be worse than a nation of Hottentots. “ The fear of God ” is the basis, as of all the social duties, so particularly of obedience to the civil powers. The one comprehends and includes the other, as the greater the less. From the one the other follows by natural consequence ; and nothing can be of higher obligation than the will of God. If the authority of God cannot constrain and oblige us, it must be expected that the authority of man will have but little lasting effect upon us. Loose principles of religion must necessarily introduce loose principles of government, and disturb the peace and order and happiness of society. If men are under no fear or restraint of God, there can be no dependence upon the most solemn oaths and engagements, which are the greatest securities of government. Shake off this principle, and you unhinge the world ; there is no bond to hold society together.

Religion is necessary for the support of government, as nothing else can supply the defects of human laws and constitutions. For human laws respect only overt acts, and bind the outward man ; but the fear of God controls the mind and conscience, directs the intentions as well as regulates the actions. A man may be guilty of many breaches of the law in private, and yet escape public justice ; but he will do nothing amiss in private any more than in public who setteth God always before him,

and acteth always as in his presence. A man may be very wicked and profligate, offend against the spirit of the law, and yet keep within the letter of it ; but religion influenceth the whole man, and will make us (*Rom. xiii. 5.*) “ subject not only for wrath but also for conscience-sake.” Human laws cannot restrain and prohibit some irregularities without the danger of introducing others as pernicious and destructive ; but (*Psal. xix. 7.*) “ the law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul,” and equally an enemy to every evil work. Human laws principally enjoin such duties as more immediately affect the being and safety of society, but others there are no less conducive to the public welfare and happiness, such as humanity, hospitality, charity, gratitude, love of our country, and the like, which human laws cannot reach. Here, therefore, religion is wanted to lend an helping hand, to complete the obligation, and enforce it by divine authority. Human laws are framed rather to punish and discountenance the bad, than to reward and encourage the good ; so that in this sense we may say truly with the apostle (*1 Tim. v. 9.*), that “ the law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners.” Princes and governors cannot always distinguish the proper objects of their favour. This privilege belongs to him alone, who trieth the hearts and the reins. But if they were able to distinguish them, yet human means can never find a fund sufficient to reward them. The sanction of rewards, therefore, must be

derived from religion. God, and God alone, can (*Matt.* xvi. 27.) “reward every man according to his works.”

Religion not only supplies the defects of human laws, but farther improves and advances our civil duties to the highest perfection. The church wisely consults and promotes the honour of the king by acknowledging her own dependency and his supremacy in all causes, as well ecclesiastical as civil. This power was for many ages usurped by a foreign bishop; but, by being restored to its rightful and lawful proprietor, all the absurdities are avoided, all the inconveniences are prevented of an empire within an empire. We are now taught (1 *Pet.* ii. 13.) to “submit ourselves to the king as supreme for the Lord’s sake;” and none other principle of duty can be so steady and permanent as this, or so to be depended upon at all times and upon all occasions. Convenience, interest, the fear of punishment, the hope of preferment, may avail much in engaging some men’s obedience; but if these circumstances should happen to change, their dispositions and affections may change too, unless actuated by the superior motives of religion and the fear of God. Religion and the fear of God should be the rule and measure of our obedience to the civil powers. We should obey in every thing that is right, and in nothing that is wrong. A good prince *would not*, and a bad one *ought not* to be further obeyed. Religion and the fear of God will not only influence our external obedience, but also command the heart

and affections ; so that we shall pay our duty for duty's sake, and without any subterfuge or evasion (*Rom. xiii. 7.*) “ render to all their dues, tribute to whom tribute is due, custom to whom custom, fear to whom fear, honour to whom honour.” Religion and the fear of God will not only produce the most ready and cheerful submission, the most faithful and hearty service, but will likewise engage our devotions ; and besides paying the tribute of our obedience, we shall offer up (*1 Tim. ii. 1, &c.*) our most “ earnest supplications and prayers for kings, and for all that are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. This,” saith the apostle, “ is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour :” and if our Saviour hath promised to hear the petitions of “ two or three” assembled together in his name, how prevalent must be the united prayers of a whole church and kingdom ! Besides “ supplications, prayers,” and “ intercessions,” the apostle mentions also “ giving of thanks ;” and surely we never can have greater reason to be thankful than for the blessings of good government, for the happiness that we enjoy and have long enjoyed, and for the hope and prospect that we have of its being continued to the latest generations. If we are not in all respects the happiest people upon earth, it must be only our own perverseness and dissensions that will disturb our happiness.

Since, then, the Church and State have so much influence upon each other, let those who govern,

cherish and promote religion, as they would render their government easy and happy. Let those also who would be thought religious, approve their religion by their loyalty; and those who would be thought faithful subjects, approve their loyalty by their religion. The case of God and a good king is the direct reverse to that of God and mammon. The duties are inseparable. We cannot duly serve the one without serving the other. We cannot "fear God," we cannot be good Christians, and not "honour the king." We cannot "honour the king," we cannot be good subjects, and not "fear God." Wherefore (*James*, ii. 13.) "so speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty. Render, therefore, unto Cesar the things which are Cesar's, and unto God the things which are God's. Happy are the people that are in such a case, yea, blessed are the people who have the Lord for their God!"

THE GOOD SAMARITAN.*

LUKE, x. 37.

Go, and do thou likewise.

AT the first hearing of these words, you will recollect them to be the conclusion and application of the parable or story of the traveller "that fell among thieves, who stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead:" a parable so well known, that I presume there is not any occasion to refresh your memory with a detail of the circumstances of it. It is related in such a natural and lively manner, that many have been inclined to think it a real story rather than a parable: but whether it be the one or the other, it is so very striking and affecting, that it cannot fail of leaving the strongest impression upon every breast that hath the least tincture of humanity. Instead therefore of entering into the particulars of the story, it will be sufficient to consider the example of the good Samaritan, which our Saviour here proposeth for our imitation, and to show how proper and applicable it is to the design of this present assembly, the support and encouragement

* Preached at Bristol, for the benefit of the Infirmary.

of an hospital for the relief of the sick and the diseased, the maimed and the wounded, that we may not, like the priest and Levite, “pass by on the other side,” but like the good Samaritan “have compassion on them,” and, as our Saviour exhorts us, “go and do likewise.”

I. The first particular that will naturally engage our attention is the person here proposed for a pattern of goodness, a Samaritan, a stranger and alien from the commonwealth of Israel; by which trait our Saviour plainly designed, not only to lessen the prejudices of his countrymen against the people of Samaria, but withal to signify what is of much greater use and importance, that there may be good men of all religions and countries, that acts of mercy and kindness are the principal acts of religion, that a man's practice is to be regarded more than his profession, and let his profession be what it will, his humanity and charity will be still a powerful recommendation of him, and an example worthy of imitation.

It must be confessed that the Samaritans were no better than a mongrel race, descended from idolatrous heathens and apostate Jews. They were really heretics and schismatics from the true church of God; and instead of making, as they ought to have made, Jerusalem their place of worship, they set up temple against temple and altar against altar on mount Gerizim. By these means so great enmity was kindled between the two nations, and their religious differences were inflamed to such a

height, that they had no civil intercourse or correspondence the one with the other; for, as St. John observes (*John*, iv. 9.), “the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans.” Our Saviour, who was himself universal love and benevolence, took every proper occasion of reproofing these narrow prejudices in others, and of opening and enlarging their minds to more noble and generous sentiments. Several instances might be given particularly with regard to the Samaritans; and here, in the story before us, we see him recommending a compassionate Samaritan to our imitation in preference to two venerable characters of his own nation, a priest and a Levite.

Humanity and compassion are the distinguishing characteristics of men as men. Religion may improve them. Religion can never extinguish them. It is only a false religion that can ever suppress or extinguish them. The true religion will always cherish and improve them: and “by this,” saith our Saviour (*John*, xiii. 35.), “shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.” This is the test and criterion of true religion (*James*, i. 27.). “Pure religion, and undefiled before God and the Father, is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.” Without this all other marks of religion are vain and to no purpose (*1 Cor.* xiii. 2, 3.) “Though we have all faith so that we could remove mountains, though we give our bodies to be burned” and die martyrs

for our religion, “yet if we have not charity, it profiteth us nothing.” It is not so much what we have believed as what we have practised that will avail to our eternal salvation.

As good works are the grace and ornament of the best religion, so they are some palliation and excuse even for the worst. If we measure by our Saviour’s rule, we shall think a charitable Samaritan, a heretic, a schismatic, more deserving than a proud priest and Levite, than two uncharitable orthodox believers, more valuable in himself, more imitable to men, more acceptable to God. For (*Acts*, x. 34, 35.) “God is no respecter of persons : but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.”

About modes of faith there will always be disputes and differences ; but in acts of mercy and kindness all mankind may agree, and should agree. An hospital for the sick and maimed is of no sect or party ; but Jews and Samaritans, believers and infidels, papists and protestants, churchmen and dissenters, how much soever they may differ in other matters, yet here may all unite and act in friendly consort together. Whatever be our professions and denominations, yet here we may show ourselves *men*, and I had almost said *Christians*. We cannot, perhaps, pretend to vindicate the faith and religion of all who subscribe and contribute to these useful institutions, but we may, however, commend their benevolent, beneficent temper. If their morals are less pure and perfect in other respects, yet thus far

at least they merit commendation ; and that they may not rise up in judgment against us, we should avoid their faults, but approve their virtues, and “ go and do likewise.”

II. Next after the principal actor in this scene, the person who had compassion, we shall naturally turn our thoughts to the poor sufferer whom he had compassion upon ; and as the one was a Samaritan, this other appears to have been a Jew (ver. 30.). “ A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves.” The honest Samaritan would have deserved highly to be commended for his humane and generous behaviour, whoever had been the object of his compassion ; and I think little doubt can be made that he would have shown the same compassion to any man in the same circumstances of distress. But he certainly merits still higher commendation for overcoming the prejudices of education, breaking through the restraints of his religion and country, for sacrificing the resentments of a Samaritan to the feelings of a man, and treating an adversary with humanity and kindness more like a friend and neighbour.

Great as his generosity was in itself, it appears to yet greater advantage by being contrasted with the cool and indifferent behaviour (to say no worse) of the priest and the Levite. He performs more good offices, and manifests greater regard for a stranger of a different persuasion, than they do for one of their own country and of the same religion

with themselves. Whoever hath the heart and bowels of a man must be sensibly affected, and as much pleased with the generosity of the one, as offended with the indifference of the others. A man “stripped, and wounded, and half dead,” one would think, was a sight that would move any man’s pity; and he hardly deserves the name of *man* who can “come, and look on, and pass on by the other side.”

Such a lamentable object, lying in the street or in the highway, you would make no scruple of admitting into your hospital without any other recommendation than his own wretchedness and misery; and the greater the misery, the stronger the recommendation. Human nature in distress is surely of itself an object worthy of pity, without taking into consideration any other circumstances of trade or profession, sect or party, religion or country. These considerations may increase the obligation; they can never take it away. As persons of all sects and parties should join in acts of mercy and charity, so persons of all sects and parties too should be allowed to partake of the benefit. You should follow the apostle’s exhortation, and endeavour (*Gal.* vi. 10.), “as you have opportunity, to do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith;” to relieve as much as you can all objects, especially the most proper and deserving.

III. We should also remark the manner and circumstances of the Samaritan’s behaviour, that we

may be the better enabled to follow his example, and “go and do likewise:” and particularly his readiness to relieve and assist a poor destitute helpless fellow-creature, his care and tenderness in conducting him to a house of good reception, and his generosity in maintaining him there, and defraying his expenses till he was recovered and made able again to pursue his journey.

His readiness to relieve and assist a poor destitute helpless fellow-creature is very conspicuous : for he was struck the moment he beheld the traveller lying on the ground, “stripped,” and “wounded,” and “half dead” (ver. 33.). “When he saw him, he had compassion on him;” and human nature, unless strangely hardened and depraved indeed, is naturally moved to pity at the first sight of so wretched an object. It is a kind of secret instinct that riseth in us, almost whether we will or not, before there is time for reason or reflection. But this is merely passive virtue, and humanity as well as religion requires that it should also be active. It is but reasonable to suppose that the priest and the Levite would feel, and could not but feel, some emotions of pity at the sight of their wounded and dying countryman. But they excused themselves to themselves ; they were going upon urgent business ; their journey required haste ; they were obliged to attend the offices of religion ; they had no skill in surgery, and could not be of any real service to the wounded person ; it might be dangerous for them to remain longer in that place ; the

same robbers might fall upon them too ; charity begins at home, and it was more prudent for them to consult their own safety than the preservation of a dying man. But the Samaritan was above such selfish considerations, he acted upon nobler motives. He not only “ had compassion ” on the wounded traveller, but also gave effectual proofs of it (ver. 34.) ; “ went to him, and bound up his wounds.” His business might be urgent, but the necessity of the poor miserable traveller was still more urgent ; any delay might be inconvenient to him, but to the other it would prove fatal ; the trouble to himself would be more than compensated by the benefit of the other ; he preferred “ mercy ” before “ sacrifice ; ” he thought that the best religion, the greatest duty, was to do good ; he could not administer all the relief that he would, but however he would administer all that he could ; he was not to be terrified by an uncertain danger from doing a certain duty ; the hazard to himself was nothing when compared to saving the life of a man, who must perish very soon if not immediately assisted. Such also is the case of many persons who are admitted into your hospital, and if not speedily succoured, would soon be past all remedy. The readiness of the relief and assistance is one principal recommendation of these institutions ; and it is certainly much for the ease and benefit of the mind, as well as of the body, to know where to apply for help in case of need. If the Samaritan had any knowledge

of pharmacy, it was happy for the wounded traveller. However we see him "binding up his wounds," and "pouring in oil and wine," which formerly were much used in medicines. You perhaps cannot perform any operation of any kind, but you all know where the best advice and the best medicines may, even in any sudden emergency, be readily obtained. Your hospital is not like the famous pool of "Bethesda," which is supposed to have had salutary effects only at certain seasons; for (*John*, v. 3.) there "lay a great multitude of impotent folk, of blind, halt, withered, waiting for the moving of the water." This house of mercy hath her doors always open to receive and relieve distressed objects; they are almost sure to find present assistance either as in or as out-patients; they have no occasion to "wait for the moving of the water;" and contrary to the case of the poor impotent man in the Gospel, who (ver. 5.) "had an infirmity thirty and eight years," the most necessitous are the first to gain admittance. In all societies certain rules and orders for admission must be observed; but casualties and accidents, being subject to no rule or order, obtain immediate admittance, whether recommended or not, at any hour by day or by night. What St. Paul saith of the churches of Macedonia is very applicable to this charitable society (2 *Cor.* viii. 3.), that "to your power, yea and beyond your power, you are willing" to do good: and you may rest assured of what the apostle farther addeth (ver. 12.), that "if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to

that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not."

Not contented with having exerted his best endeavours towards assuaging the pains of the wounded traveller, the Samaritan farther manifests his care and tenderness by conducting him to a house of good reception; for (ver. 24.) "he set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him." The word *πανδοχειον*, which we translate *an inn*, signifies in general any house of reception for all sorts of people, and consequently among its other meanings may include *an hospital* for the relief of persons of different sexes, ages, and countries. Whether there were any such things as public hospitals in those early times, is much to be questioned: or rather it may be said, that those early times were strangers to such useful institutions; they are improvements owing to the munificence and charity of later ages; and Christianity hath the honour of the first institution of the kind.* If there had been any hospital at that time and in that place, we may be confident that the Samaritan would have conveyed his patient thither, instead of conducting him to an inn, or whatever other house it was of general

* Jerome saith, that Fabiola, a wealthy Christian widow, of a noble Roman family, who died in his time, first erected a public infirmary: "*Prima omnium νοσοκομειον instituit, in quo ægrotantes colligeret de plateis, et consumpta languoribus atque inediâ miserorum membra foveret.*" — *Epist. viii. edit. Bened.* See Archbishop Secker's Sermon before the Governors of the London Hospital.

resort and reception. A public hospital is more efficacious than any private charity, for the same reason that the joint efforts of many generally prevail over those of a few. As more concur in its support, so more may partake of the benefit. You may here procure advice and assistance for a poor patient, restore health to the sick and limbs to the lame, upon much easier terms than you can by any other method of contribution. What you contribute singly and by itself can go but a little way towards supplying the wants and re-establishing the health and strength of one miserable creature ; but when added to the common stock, its good effects may extend to numbers. Here too you are secured from fraud and imposition, and what you bestow is bestowed upon real objects of charity. No man knoweth so little of the world as to be ignorant that there are abundance of cheats and impostors, who frequent the streets and public ways, and are commonly the most successful, because the most clamorous and importunate beggars. In some measure they resemble other counterfeits of old, the idols of the heathens : (*Psalm cxv. 5. 7.*) “ they have mouths, but they speak not ; eyes have they, but they see not ; they have hands, but they handle not ; feet have they, but they walk not.” Now it is not always easy to distinguish these pretended dumb and blind and lame from those who are really so ; and this very thing is often the source of great evil, is a damp and discouragement to charity on the one hand, or occasions a misapplication and abuse of it on the

other. But in a hospital the counterfeit is certain to be detected, the real patient only is admitted. As the former can never have the impudence to apply here for relief, so the latter may be assured always here to find it. Here also the poor may have the benefit of such advice and medicines, as it is out of their power to procure in any other place or by any other means. By these means the poor are in some degree put upon a level with the rich, and obtain the benefit, which they could not otherwise do, of assistance from the most able physicians and surgeons; and they both are of mutual service and advantage to each other. The former have the better chance of recovering their health by the skill and experience of the latter; the latter have opportunities of gaining yet farther skill and experience by the various infirmities and diseases of the former.

But the Samaritan's goodness to the wounded traveller did not stop here. He not only conducted him to a house of good reception, but also displayed his generosity by maintaining him there, and defraying his expenses till he was recovered, and made able again to pursue his journey. For (verse 35.) "on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence (about fifteen or sixteen pence of our money) and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee." What was the real character and proper business of this *host* as he is called, this πανδοχευς, this receiver and

entertainer of all comers, it is not easy for us to determine ; but the Samaritan, we see, had so good an opinion of him that he intrusted his wounded patient to his care, advanced money to him for what he might expend in that service, and engaged at his return that way to repay him for what he might expend more. Here you have greatly the advantage over the Samaritan. The very names and characters of the governors of this charity ; their care, attendance, and application ; their ability, fidelity, and economy ; are not only above all suspicion, but give the fullest assurance of their executing, in the best manner and to the best advantage, the great and important trust reposed in them : and every year, like faithful stewards, they submit the state of their accounts, their receipts and payments, and in short their whole proceedings, to the inspection of the subscribers in particular, and of the public in general ; and the more they are examined, the more they are approved. Here also you are assured, that the best care is taken of the health of the poor patients ; and they have the opportunities and advantages of such skilful advice, such proper medicines, such wholesome diet, such cleanly lodgings, such careful nurses, that if they are curable, they cannot well fail of being cured : and the many thousands of sick and lame, who have been discharged from hence whole and sound, are so many living testimonies of the beneficial effects as well as of the benevolent intentions of this institution ; and at the same time that they silence all censure, transcend all commend-

ation. But your care and attention should not be confined only to the health of their bodies, but should extend likewise to the cure of their better parts, their souls. But, in this respect, I am sorry to say that you are very deficient, and that this is almost the only established hospital in the kingdom where some provision of this sort is not made out of the general fund. Here it is owing to the particular bounty of some subscribers, and especially the clergy, and lately of the Corporation and Society of Merchants, that there is a chaplain constantly attending upon the poor patients; and when they are groaning under the diseases which are the consequences of their vices, they will naturally grow weary of the vices which are the causes of their diseases: and Christian doctrine, daily prayers, pious instructions, good books, must then, if ever, have their due weight and influence, and work a thorough reformation. So that they have the chance of obtaining a double cure,—of recovering their strength and reforming their manners,—and going from hence not only sounder men but better Christians, more useful to society, more thankful to their benefactors, and to God the benefactor of all (2 *Cor.* xi. 12.); “for the administration of this service not only supplieth the want of the saints, but is abundant also by many thanksgivings unto God.”

Such is the character of the good Samaritan, so worthy of imitation; and so well do you imitate and resemble him. But you are entitled to yet higher commendation. You follow still a greater and

better example than this Samaritan. You imitate, as far as you can, your blessed Saviour and Redeemer (*Acts*, x. 38. *Mat.* iv. 23.), “who went about doing good, and healing all manner of sickness, and all manner of disease among the people.” And to animate and encourage us to perseverance in these good works, he represents them as the great and trying articles, upon which chiefly we shall be acquitted or condemned at the last day; and assures us, that what we shall do or not do in this kind to the least and lowest of our brethren, he will accept as done or not done to himself, and will reward or punish us accordingly. On the one hand he will say (*Matt.* xxv. 34, &c.), “Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me in; naked, and ye clothed me; I was sick, and ye visited me; I was in prison, and ye came unto me: for verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.” On the other hand he will say, “Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was an hungered, and ye gave me no meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me not in; naked, and ye clothed me not; sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not: for verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of

these, ye did it not to me." Words there cannot be more forcible than these to recommend an hospital or infirmary for the sick and diseased; and God give us the grace so to show mercy unto others, that we ourselves may obtain mercy in the great day of the Lord!

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Sermons. To which is prefixed a short Account of the Life and Character of the Author. BY JAMES FINLAYSON, D.D. 1827. 8vo.

A collection of Sermons by eminent Divines of the last half century would hardly be considered complete without *some* specimen of those by a writer of such established celebrity as Dr. BLAIR. Accordingly I give place to the insertion of *two* specimens, of which the first seems to be peculiarly characteristic of the equable, polished, and persuasive style discernible in the author in question. The second will be read with no common interest; inasmuch as, according to the testimony of Dr. Finlayson, it is the LAST sermon the author wrote—at a very advanced period of his life—approximating fourscore: “a sermon (says his editor) written with great dignity and eloquence, and which should be regarded as his solemn admonition to a class of men whose conduct is highly important to the community, and whose reformation and virtue he had long laboured most zealously to promote.” At this time of day, to pass any detailed, elaborate opinion upon the sermons of Dr. Blair, were equally a waste of words and of time. They have found their way into the closets of thousands of pious Christians, and although, of late years, they have been considerably

surpassed in strength of argument and eloquence of diction, yet no well disposed person can rise from their perusal without the consciousness that they contain materials to make him both a wiser and a happier man, if he chooses sedulously to practise what they so earnestly enjoin.

ON TRANQUILLITY OF MIND.

PSALM XV. 5.

He that doeth these things shall never be moved.

TRANQUILLITY of mind, or, in the words of the text, a mind *not moved* or disquieted by the accidents of life, is undoubtedly one of the greatest blessings that we can possess on earth. It is here mentioned as the reward of the man whose character had been described in this psalm, as leading a virtuous life, and discharging his duty towards God and his neighbour. It is indeed the ultimate aim, to which the wishes of the wise and reflecting have ever been directed, that with a mind undisturbed by anxieties, cares, and fears, they might pass their days in a pleasing serenity. They justly concluded that, by enjoying themselves in peace, they would enjoy, to the greatest advantage, all the comforts of life that came within their reach.

This happy tranquillity the multitude conceive to be most readily attainable by means of wealth, or, at least, of an easy fortune ; which they imagine would set them above all the ordinary disturbances of life. That it has some effect for this purpose, cannot be denied. Poverty and straitened circum-

stances are often inconsistent with tranquillity. To be destitute of those conveniences that suit our rank in the world ; to be burdened with anxiety about making provision for every day which passes over our head ; instead of bringing comfort to a family who look up to us for aid, to behold ourselves surrounded with their wants and complaints ; are circumstances which cannot fail to give much uneasiness to every feeling mind. To take measures, therefore, for attaining a competent fortune by laudable means is wise and proper. Entire negligence of our affairs, and indifference about our worldly circumstances, is, for the most part, the consequence of some vice, or some folly. At the same time, I must observe, that the attainment of opulence is no certain method of attaining tranquillity. Embarrassments and vexations often attend it ; and long experience has shown, that tranquillity is far from being always found among the rich. Nay, the higher that men rise in the world, the greater degrees of power and distinction which they acquire, they are often the farther removed from internal peace. The world affords so many instances of miseries abounding in the higher ranks of life, that it were needless to enlarge on a topic so generally known and admitted.

Assuming it, therefore, for an undoubted truth, that the mere possession of the goods of fortune may be consistent with the want of inward tranquillity, we must look around for other more certain grounds of it. We must enquire whether any line of con-

duct can be pointed out which, independently of external situation in the world, shall tend to make us easy in mind; shall either bestow, or aid, that tranquillity which all men desire. The remaining part of this discourse shall be employed in suggesting, with great plainness of speech, such directions as appear to me most material on this important subject.

The *first* direction which I have to suggest is, That we imitate the character of the man who is described in this Psalm as “walking uprightly, working righteousness, and speaking the truth, as he thinketh in his heart;” that we study to preserve a clear conscience, and to lead a virtuous and honourable, at least an inoffensive and innocent, life. Of such a man only it can be said, that, “doing these things, he shall never be moved.” So great is the power of conscience over every human being, that the remembrance of crimes never fails to overthrow tranquillity of mind. Be assured, that he who defrauds his neighbour, who has ensnared the innocent, has violated his trust, or betrayed his friend, shall never enjoy within himself undisturbed quiet. His evil deeds will at times recur to his thoughts, like ghosts rising up in black array before him to haunt his couch. Even the sense of a foolish and trifling conduct, of a life past in idleness and dissipation; by which, though a man has not been guilty of great crimes, he has, however, wasted his substance, mispent his time, and brought upon himself just reproach; even this, I say, is sufficient to create

much uneasiness and disquiet to the heart. Let him, therefore, who wishes to enjoy tranquillity, study, above all things, to act an irreproachable part. With comfort he will rest his head on his pillow at night, when he is conscious that throughout the day he has been doing his duty towards God and man; when none of the transactions of that day come back, in painful remembrance, to upbraid him. To this testimony of a good conscience, let him be able,

In the *second* place, To join humble trust in the favour of God. As, after the best endeavours we can use, no man's behaviour will be entirely faultless, it is essential to peace of mind that we have some ground for hope in the divine mercy, that, through the merits of Jesus Christ, our defects shall be forgiven, and grace be shown us by Heaven. This includes all the duties of faith and repentance that are required by the Gospel; the faithful discharge of which duties is absolutely necessary for delivering us from those fears of another world, which, if not allayed, are sufficient to banish all tranquillity from the heart. Our religious principles must at the same time be sound and pure; and carefully preserved from the taint of superstition, whose gloomy horrors, taking possession of weak and ill-informed minds, convert what they mistake for religion into a source of misery.—Moreover, it is necessary that we be able to place trust in God, not only as our future Judge, but as the present Governor of human affairs. So uncertain is the continuance of

every earthly comfort, that he who reposes no confidence in the Supreme Disposer of events, must be often disquieted and dejected. He alone possesses firm tranquillity, who, amidst all human vicissitudes, looks up, with settled trust, to an Almighty Ruler, as to one under whose conduct he is safe. To him alone belongs that happy privilege, described by the Psalmist : “ He shall not be afraid of evil tidings ; his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord.” *

I have pointed out the primary and essential foundations of tranquillity ; virtuous conduct, good principles, and pious dispositions. At the same time, a man may be both pious and virtuous, and yet, through some defects in the management of his mind and temper, may not possess that happy serenity and self-enjoyment, which ought to be the portion of virtue and piety. Instances of this will occur to every one who is acquainted with the world. We too often behold persons, whose principles, and whose moral conduct, are in the main unexceptionable, leading an uncomfortable life ; through fretfulness of temper, peevishness of manners, or sullenness of disposition. There is, therefore, some discipline to be studied ; there are some subsidiary parts of character to be attended to, in order to give piety and virtue their full effect for conferring tranquillity. To the consideration of these secondary means I now proceed. Let me then advise you,

In the *third* place, To attend to the culture and

* Psalm cxii. 7.

improvement of your minds. A fund of useful knowledge, and a stock of ideas, afford much advantage for the enjoyment of tranquillity. I do not mean, that every man must study to become deeply learned. The situation of many would not allow it. The taste and the habits of others prevent it. But what I mean is, that every man who wishes to lead a comfortable life, should provide for himself, as much as he can, by means of observation, reading, and reflecting, a large field of useful thoughts. In a mind absolutely vacant, tranquillity is seldom found. The vacancy too often will be filled up by bad desires and passions. Whereas the mind of a wise man is a kingdom to itself. In his lonely or melancholy hours, he finds always resources within himself to which he can turn for relief. As there are many occasions when external objects afford no pleasure, it is only by being able to rest on the entertainments afforded to himself by his mind, that any one can pass his days with self-enjoyment. Let me recommend for the same purpose,

In the *fourth* place, That we be always careful to provide proper employment for our time. Regular industry and labour, with intervals of ease, is perhaps the state most conducive of any to tranquillity. If our station give no call to industry, it will be profitable, that we study to have some end or object in view, to which our attention should be directed. Relaxation from intense or incessant pursuit is requisite for comfort ; but if relaxation degenerate into total idleness, it becomes in a high degree adverse

to tranquillity. Every man by his nature is formed, more or less, for action. In a mind that is entirely quiescent, and that has no object to put it into motion, instead of self-enjoyment, there will be constant languor, tediousness, and misery. Life stagnates in such a situation, like a pool of dead waters; and the man becomes a burden to himself. Violent and dangerous pursuits, which distract and embroil those who are engaged in them, I cannot be understood to recommend. Every one sees how foreign these are to a state of tranquillity. But, in the ordinary tenour of calm and easy life, I would advise every one to have some end before him; some object which shall bring the mind into action, and fill up the vacuities of time. Provided the object be innocent, and of no unsuitable or degrading nature, it may answer this purpose, though it should not be in itself of high importance. It is better for the mind to have some determinate direction given it, than to be always left floating, as it were, in empty space. But about whatever objects we are employed, it is still more material to tranquillity, that, in the

Fifth place, We learn to govern our passions. These are the most frequent disturbers of our peace. Necessary as their impulse is to give activity to the mind, yet if they are not kept in subordination to reason, they speedily throw all things into confusion. Such of them as belong to the malignant and unsocial class, evidently tend to produce vexation and disquiet. Against suffering these to gain possession

of the heart, admonition is scarcely necessary. But I must admonish you, that even those which are accounted of an innocent nature, and which, therefore, may lay hold of virtuous minds, if they obtain the entire mastery, are sufficient to overthrow the tranquillity of life. Let every one, therefore, who values that tranquillity, study to retain moderation and self-command, even in the midst of passions which have a fair and bland appearance. He will find that the gratification of any one of them, compensates not that perpetual slavery to which it will reduce him, when it becomes inordinate.

I have farther to admonish you, that this self-command is particularly necessary in all that relates to habitual temper. Even where strong passions are out of the question, those slight emotions which ruffle or sour the temper, are sufficient, by their frequent recurrence, to poison all self-enjoyment. He who would possess a tranquil state, must, above all things, cultivate calmness and gentleness of disposition. He ought especially to cultivate it in that society, whether domestic or social, with which he has most frequent intercourse. We all know, that there are thousands who in public, and in formal companies, appear to be all gentleness and sweetness, but who, at home, and among their nearest relations, give vent, with freedom, to the most harsh and peevish dispositions. Such persons are not likely to enjoy much real comfort. For it is in the daily and familiar intercourse of life that temper chiefly exerts its power, either for promoting or for disturbing the

tranquillity of our days. On occasions when men come closest together, if, instead of meeting in smooth contact, they rub and grate on one another, the feelings produced on both sides are of the most offensive and displeasing kind. Nothing can be assumed as a more certain axiom, than that he who allows either inordinate passions, or a cross temper, to govern him, must, though he should possess all that flourishing fortune can bestow, be a stranger to tranquillity.

In the *sixth* place, Let me advise you never to expect too much from the world. High hopes, and florid views, are great enemies to tranquillity. When rashly indulged, they are constantly producing disappointments. Their indulgence, in the mean time, occasions discontent with our present situation ; and he who is discontented cannot be happy. One of the first lessons, both of religion and wisdom, is, to moderate our expectations and hopes ; and not to set forth on the voyage of life, like men who expect to be always carried forward with a favourable gale. Let your views be suited to your rank and station in the world ; and never soar fantastically beyond them. Content yourselves with sober pleasures, and form your relish to them. Be thankful when you are free from pain, though you be not in the midst of high enjoyment. Be satisfied, if the path you tread be easy and smooth, though it be not strewed with flowers. Human life admits not of continued pleasure ; nor is it always rendered happy by great exaltation. Remember, that it is a middle region

which is the native station of tranquillity. It neither aspires to those heights of the atmosphere where the thunder is formed, nor creeps always on the ground. Affect not, on every occasion, to put yourselves forward. Be content to retire sometimes into the shade ; and allow others to take their proper place. It will be easily seen, that I speak not now to the ambitious and aspiring ; but to those who value tranquillity more than splendid appearance in the world.

Such persons I also advise, while they expect not too much from the world, neither, also, to form too high expectations from the characters of those on whose friendship they rest, and with whom it is their lot to be connected, either in social or domestic relations. If you have looked for perfection any where, you will find yourself disappointed ; and the consequence of this disappointment will be, that friendship will cool, and disgust succeed. If you wish to enjoy comfort in any of your connections, take your fellow-creatures as they are, and look for their imperfections to appear. You know you have your own ; bear with those of others, as you expect that they are to bear with you. As no one is without his failings, few also are void of amiable qualities. Select for your companions those who have the greatest share of such qualities ; and value them accordingly. — In a word, make the best of this world as you find it. Reckon both on the state of human life, and on the society of men, as mixed and chequered with good and evil. Carrying always in

your eye such views of things, you will be best formed to those equal spirits, and that reasonable disposition of mind, which make the basis of tranquillity. I shall only add, as my

Seventh and last advice on this subject, To mix retreat with the active business of the world, and to cultivate habits of serious thought and recollection. I before advised those who are not particularly engaged in active life, to form to themselves some object of pursuit, in order to furnish proper employment to time and thought. But the great multitude of men are in a different situation. Industry is required of them; business and cares press; and active pursuits occupy their closest attention. He who, in this situation, pours himself forth incessantly on the world, cannot escape partaking much of its disturbance and trouble. Amidst bustle, intrigue, and dissension, he must pass many an uneasy hour. Here an enemy encounters him; there, a rival meets him. A suspicious friend alarms him one hour; an ungrateful one provokes him the next. I do not recommend that, for these reasons, he who studies tranquillity should retire from all public business, and forsake the haunts of men. This were the retreat of a monk, not of a good and a wise man. Tranquillity were too dearly purchased by the neglect of those duties which belong to a man and a Christian. Nor, indeed, in absolute seclusion from the world is tranquillity ever found. On the contrary, when the human mind is cut off from those employments for which it was designed by nature

and Providence, it preys on itself, and engenders its own misery. Tranquillity is always most likely to be attained, when the business of the world is tempered with thoughtful and serious retreat. "Commune with your hearts on your bed, and be still." Leaving this world to itself, let there be seasons which you devote to yourselves and to God. Reflection and meditation allay the workings of many unquiet passions, and place us at a distance from the tumults of the world. When the mind has either been ruffled or cast down, an intercourse with God and heaven we find a sanctuary to which we can retreat. In the hours of contemplation and devotion, a good man enjoys himself in peace. He beholds nobler objects than what worldly men can behold. He assumes a higher character. He listens to the voice of nature and of God; and from this holy sanctuary comes forth with a mind fortified against the little disturbances of the world. Such habits, therefore, cannot be too much recommended to the lovers of tranquillity, as powerful subsidiary means for attaining that happy state.

I have thus pointed out what appears to me the discipline of religion and wisdom for tranquillity of mind. "He that doeth these things shall never be moved."—During the early periods of life, vivid sensations of pleasure are the sole objects thought worthy of pursuit. Mere ease and calmness are despised, as the portion of the aged only, and the feeble. Some longer acquaintance with the world, with its disappointed hopes and fallacious pleasures,

teaches almost all men, by degrees, to wish for tranquillity and peace. But you must not imagine, that these are blessings which will drop on men of their own accord, as soon as they begin to desire them. No : the thoughtless and the profligate will ever remain strangers to them. They will remain the sport of every accident that occurs to derange their minds, and to disturb their life. — The three great enemies to tranquillity are, Vice, Superstition, and Idleness : Vice, which poisons and disturbs the mind with bad passions ; Superstition, which fills it with imaginary terrors ; Idleness, which loads it with tediousness and disgust. It is only by following the path which eternal Wisdom has pointed out, that we can arrive at the blessed temple of Tranquillity, and obtain a station there : By doing, or at least endeavouring to do, our duty to God and man ; by acquiring a humble trust in the mercy and favour of God through Jesus Christ ; by cultivating our minds, and properly employing our time and thoughts ; by governing our passions and our temper ; by correcting all unreasonable expectations from the world, and from men ; and, in the midst of worldly business, habituating ourselves to calm retreat and serious recollection. By such means as these it may be hoped that, through the divine blessing, our days shall flow in a stream as unruffled as the human state admits. “The wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest. But the work of righteousness is peace ; and the effect of righteousness is quietness and assurance for ever.” *

* Isaiah, xxxii. 17.

ON A LIFE OF DISSIPATION AND
PLEASURE.

PROVERBS, xiv. 13.

Even in laughter the heart is sorrowful; and the end of that mirth is heaviness.

PAINS and sorrows occur so frequently in human life, that it is not surprising that the multitude of men should eagerly court scenes of pleasure and joy. It is natural to seek relief from our cares, by whatever promises to substitute hours of gladness in the place of anxiety and trouble. But we have much reason to beware, lest a rash or unwary pursuit of pleasure defeat its end—lest the attempt to carry pleasure too far, tend, in the issue, to sink us into misery. “There is a way,” says the wise man in the verse preceding the text, “which seemeth right unto a man; but the end thereof are the ways of death.” There is a certain course of life which a man may have chosen to adopt, as leading to gladness and enjoyment; but which he shall find at last to be destructive of his happiness: for all is not real gladness which has the appearance of being such. “There is a laughter, in the midst of which the heart is sorrowful; and a mirth, the end whereof is heaviness.”

From serious admonitions of this kind given in Scripture, it would be very unjust to infer, that religion is an enemy to all mirth and gaiety. It circumscribes our enjoyments, indeed, within the bounds of temperance; but, as far as this sacred limit permits, it gives free scope to all the gratifications of life. It even heightens their relish to a virtuous man. It enlivens his cheerfulness, and allows him to enjoy with satisfaction all that prosperity affords him. The text is applicable only to that set of men to whom temperance is no restraint; who propose to themselves the unlimited enjoyment of amusement and pleasure in all their forms, as the sole object and business of life.

Such persons, too frequently to be met with in the age wherein we live, have utterly mistaken the nature and condition of man. From the participation of pleasure, as I just now observed, he is far from being excluded. But let him remember that a mediocrity only of enjoyment is allowed him for his portion on earth. He is placed in a world, where, whatever his rank or station be, a certain part is allotted him to act; there are duties which are required of him; there are serious cares which must employ his mind, how to perform properly the various offices of life, and to fill up the place which belongs to him in society. — He who, laying aside all thoughts and cares of this kind, finding himself in the possession of easy or affluent fortune, and in the bloom of life, says within himself, “What have I to do, but to seek out every pleasure and amuse-

ment which the world can afford me? Let others toil in the common walks of life, who have to make their fortunes by sober and dull application. But to me labour is superfluous, the world is open. Wherever amusement invites, or pleasure calls, there I go. By passing my days and nights in whatever can entertain my fancy or gratify my senses, life shall to me be rendered delightful."—He, I say, who thinks thus, vainly endeavours to counteract the intention of nature, and the decree of Providence. He attempts to render his state on earth what it was never designed to be. He might as well expect that the physical laws of nature should be altered on his account; and that, instead of being confined to walk like ordinary men on the ground, he should obtain the privilege of treading on the air, as expect to enjoy a state of perpetual pleasure, by devoting himself to pleasure wholly, and setting aside all the serious cares and duties of life. Troubles, he may well be assured, are prepared for him, and await him. Where he expected satisfaction, he shall meet with disappointment; and in him shall be verified the saying in the text, that "even in laughter the heart is sorrowful, and the end of that mirth is heaviness."—But lest, to persons of this description, such general reasoning, from the established constitution of Providence, may not be satisfactory, I proceed to show them how clearly it is confirmed by facts. For this purpose let us observe,

In the first place, The obvious consequences of a

life of pleasure and dissipation, to health, fortune, and character. To each of these it is an enemy, precisely according to the degree to which it is carried. — Character is soon affected by it. As the man of dissipation often makes his appearance in public, his course is marked, and his character is quickly decided, by general opinion, according to the line which he is observed to pursue. By frivolity and levity, he dwindles into insignificance. By vicious excesses, or criminal pleasures, he incurs disapprobation or contempt. The fair prospects which his friends had once entertained of him die away, in proportion as his idleness or extravagance grows ; and the only hope which remains is, that some fortunate incident may occur to check his career, and reclaim him to a better mind. In the mean time, the respectable and the grave smile at his follies, and avoid his company. In the midst of some fashionable assemblies he may shine, by some of his fellows he may be admired ; but in the world he is of no significance or consequence, any more than the little animals that sport around him. — Health, the most valuable of all temporal blessings, is known to be preserved by temperance and a regular life ; but, by the men of dissipation, it is readily sacrificed at the shrine of pleasure. To years of health and soundness, they are often so foolish as to prefer a few hours of sensual gratification. Supposing that no extravagant excesses, or vicious pleasures, cut short their health and life, yet what constitution can stand the irregular hours, the dis-

orderly living, the careless indulgence, into which the love of pleasure draws those who devote themselves to it? Hence the shattered and debilitated body, and the premature old age. The native vigour and sprightliness of youth is melted down by effeminacy and sensuality. The spirits are weakened and enervated, if not sunk and lost for ever.— The state of their fortune may, for a while, enable them to indulge their pleasures, and to maintain the figure they wish to keep up in the world; but let fortune be ever so affluent, in the possession of such persons, it is in the high road to decay. For to them, attention to business, or to the management of their affairs, becomes a burden which they studiously shun. Prudent economy is disdained, as a mean attention, belonging only to vulgar and narrow minds. Their habits of licentiousness require unlimited indulgence. The demands of passion must be immediately supplied, whatever the consequences be. Hence, delivering themselves up to those who can furnish supply for their expense, or who pretend to take charge of their affairs, they become the prey of the crafty who fatten on their spoils; till at last, in the midst of thoughtless extravagance, and of general waste and confusion, they see nothing remaining to them but the ruins of a broken fortune.

Such are some of the miseries attending habits of dissipation, and the intemperate love of pleasure. We see them daily exemplified in the world, throughout all the stages of this character, from the frivo-

lous and the giddy, up to the rake and profligate ; in some stages, only impairing health and fortune ; in others, entirely overthrowing them ; in their beginnings, casting a shade on the characters of men ; in their completion, exposing them to disgrace and misery.— Even abstracting from those ultimate consequences in which irregular pleasures terminate, the gratification which, in the mean time, they bestow, is dearly paid for. A temporary satisfaction, it is admitted, they afford. They raise the spirits to a degree of elevation above their usual tone, but in that forced elevation they can never long remain ; and in proportion to the elevation to which they were raised, is the degree of depression to which they subside. Experience has shown, that no sensual pleasure, except what is regulated by temperance, can be lasting. Every pleasure that is carried beyond it is no more than a momentary explosion ; a transient gush ; a torrent that comes down impetuously, sparkling and foaming in its course, but that soon runs out, and leaves a muddy and polluted channel. Who knows not the languor and dejection that follow every excessive indulgence of pleasure, or a long continuation of amusement of any kind ? From whom do we hear such frequent complaints of low spirits, as from those who spend most of their time in the circles of dissipation and gaiety, or in the revelry of the world ? To what wretched and pernicious resources are they obliged to fly, in order to recruit their spirits, and restore some life to their deadened sensations ? What melancholy spectacles

do they at length exhibit of a worn-out frame, and an exhausted mind? So well-founded is the assertion in the text, that there is “a mirth, the end of which is heaviness.”

Let us consider, in the second place, The ruin which a life of pleasure and dissipation brings upon the moral state and character of men, as well as on their external condition. This deserves the more attention, as the pursuit of pleasure sometimes sets out at the beginning with a fair and innocent appearance. It promises to bestow satisfactions unknown to a duller race of mortals; and, at the same time, to allow virtue and honour to remain. With a great part of mankind, especially with those who are most likely to run the race of pleasure, such as are well-born, and have been regularly educated, some attachment to good principles at first is found. They cannot as yet bear the reproach of any thing that is dishonourable or base. Regard to their word, generosity of sentiment, attachment to their friends, and compassion for the unhappy, prevail for a while in their hearts.—But, alas! as the love of pleasure gains ground, with what insidious steps does it advance towards the abolition of all virtuous principles? It has been ever found, that without the assistance of reflection, and of serious thought, virtue cannot long subsist in the human mind. But to reflection and serious thoughts, the men of dissipation are strangers. Absorbed, as they are, in the whirlpool of fashionable life, and hurried along by a rapid succession of amusements, reflec-

tion is lost, and good impressions gradually decay. Nothing is regarded but present enjoyment, and plans of improving on that enjoyment in future. As their taste, and their acquired habits, carry them into the society of licentious company, they must follow the more trained votaries of pleasure who naturally take the lead. They become assimilated to the manners of their loose associates; and, without perceiving it themselves, their whole character by degrees is changed. Former restraints are now laid aside; and, in order to preserve the rank of equality with their companions in every expense, prodigality is the necessary consequence. Prodigality presently opens a way to the worst vices. They become both covetous and profuse; profuse in spending, but covetous to acquire. In order to carry on the splendour of life, and to indulge their inclinations to the full, they now submit to what, at their first outset in life, they would have rejected as mean and base. Now is the creditor defrauded; the tenant racked and oppressed; the tradesman frustrated of the reward of his honest industry; and friends and relations, on whom any impression can be made, are plundered without mercy. — In this manner all the bland and smiling appearances which mirth and gaiety once carried, are transformed into the blackest shapes of vice; and, from a character originally stamped only with giddiness and levity, shoots forth a character compounded of dishonesty, injustice, oppression, and cruelty.

Is there any one who will deny, that the intem-

perate pursuit of pleasure leads frequently into all the vices now mentioned, and that some of them it carries always in its train? I shall not dwell on certain crimes, which none but the most atrocious devotees of pleasure will pretend to justify, though all who partake of that character make too light of them; such as the violation of the marriage-bed, the seduction of the innocent, and the introduction of misery into families once happy and flourishing. These are crimes that require the interposition of the lawgiver and the judge, more than the admonition of the preacher.—Let us only think for a little of that reproach of modern times, that gulf of time and fortune, the passion for gaming, which is so often the refuge of the idle sons of pleasure, and often also the last resource of the ruined. To how many bad passions, to how many base arts, does it give rise? What violent agitations of the mind, sometimes bursting into rage and frenzy, does it occasion? What a shameful traffic of gain does it form among persons, whom their rank in life, and their connections in society, ought to have raised above the thoughts of enriching themselves by such dishonourable means? How many friendships has it broken? How many families has it ruined? In what deadly catastrophes has it often terminated? The gamester sits down at the fatal table with eager spirits and mighty hopes. Behold him when he rises,—a wretch, haggard and forlorn, cursing his fate, and, from despair of retrieving his ruined fortune, driven per-

haps to entertain the horrid thought of ending his own existence! — Dismissing so melancholy a theme, let us,

In the third place, Attend to the disquieting sensations which are apt to intrude upon the men of pleasure, even in the midst of their enjoyments. Not only is the “end of their mirth heaviness,” but “in laughter,” as it is expressed in the text, “the heart is sorrowful.” Often is laughter affected, when the heart is galled within. A show of mirth is put on to cover some secret disquiet. When you enter into a gay and festive assembly, you behold every appearance of sparkling felicity. Alas! could you look into the breasts of this seemingly happy company, how inconsiderable would the proportion be found of those who were truly happy! how great the proportion of those who, either in their minds, were entirely vacant and languid; or who fled to scenes of gaiety in order to fly from themselves, from domestic uneasiness, or corroding cares, and, in the tumult of company and forced mirth, to drown their sorrows! At the best, the flashes of joy, which burst from the dissipated and careless, are of a transient and broken kind, interrupted by reflections which they cannot altogether avoid. For, at the bottom of the hearts of most men, even amidst an irregular life, there lies a secret feeling of propriety, a sense of right and wrong in conduct. This inward sense is frequently so much borne down by appetites and passions, as to lose its power of guiding men to what is right, while yet it retains

as much influence as to make them sensible that they have been doing wrong ; that they have not acted that part in life which they ought to have acted, and which their friends and the world had a title to expect from them. Though conscience be not strong enough to guide, it still has strength to dart a sting. Together with this consciousness of ill desert, there will be at some times joined a humbling sense of their own insignificancy, when they behold others meeting with esteem and honour for having acted a manly and worthy part in life. Their superiority they are obliged to acknowledge, and to look up to them with respect ; while the retrospect of their own life affords nothing but shame, and the bitter remembrance of time they have mispent, and opportunities they have thrown away. — In the midst too of mortifying reflections of this kind, it will not be in their power to escape altogether from a dread of certain consequences which are in hazard of befalling from their careless conduct. Scarcely is any fortune so stable as to be beyond the reach of accidents that will diminish it. To none so readily as to the men of pleasure are such accidents likely to happen ; and fond as they are of their present superb train of living, the dread that it may not be in their power always to continue it will, in spite of all their endeavours to avoid such thoughts, occasionally force itself upon them, and cast a cloud over many a scene of projected merriment.

Can you reckon that to be sincere joy, which is liable to be interrupted and mingled with so many

sensations of the most disagreeable nature? In the cup of intemperance, or in the tumult of loose society, the man of pleasure studies to drown them. But often his efforts are vain. When he pushes to the utmost his scenes of criminal revelry, they will carry the resemblance of Belshazzar's feast; at which, while the impious monarch was drinking amongst his lords and concubines, he beheld the fingers of a man's hand, writing in unknown characters on the wall over against him; "and his countenance changed, and his heart sunk within him." Thus, in the midst of riot, imagined spectres have been known to haunt the man of guilty pleasure. He sees hands coming forth to write on the wall against him. The very portraits of his ancestors, which hang in his hall, appear to him to look with frowning aspect, and to upbraid him with wasting in licentious pleasures the fortune which their honourable labours or virtuous industry had acquired. — Of all the classes of sinners, it has been found, that none are so liable, in some period of their lives, or at least when life is drawing to its close, to be smitten with severe remorse, as those who have sacrificed to pleasure all the calls of conscience and of duty.

Let us consider, in the last place, how unsuitable a life of dissipation and pleasure is to the condition of man in this world, and how injurious to the interests of society. In the world, we are surrounded with scenes of distress. We behold the greatest part of the human race doomed to hard labour and

penurious subsistence. We hear the cries of indigence. We know that every day thousands are yielding up their breath, and thousands are attending their dying friends. Our own lives are fleeting fast away. Flourishing as our state may at present seem, we know there is but a step between us and death. The youngest and the healthiest cannot tell whether they may not, within the space of a few days, be called to undergo the judgment of God.— Is this a time, is this a place, where no other thing is to be pursued but giddy amusement and perpetual pleasure? Have you, my friends, who are spending your days in this wanton abuse of prosperity, no sense of the unsuitableness of such conduct to the condition of mortal man? Do you see nothing in the state of human life to chasten and temper your mirth; to bring serious reflections home to your bosom; to admonish you that it is better to go sometimes *to the house of mourning*, than to dwell always *in the house of feasting*? — Do you feel no compunction at the thought that, by your luxury and extravagance, you are adding to the scenes of sorrow which already abound in this afflicted world? For you, and your follies, the aged parent, or the respectable relation, mourn. To supply the oppressive demands of your pleasures, families are driven from their habitations, and left to poverty and want. Your mirth forces the widow and the fatherless to weep.— At the same time, you are scattering poison in society around you. You are corrupting the public manners by the life which you lead. You

are propagating follies and vices ; and by the example which you set, are ensnaring many to follow you into ruin. Consider with how much discontent and indignation the poorer classes of men, all the while, behold you. Especially, if in times of scarcity and of war, such as those in which I now write, they see you indulging in wastefulness and thoughtless profusion, when they and their families are not able to earn their bread. As long as wealth is properly employed, persons in low situations naturally look up to their superiors with respect. They rest contented in their station. They are even disposed to bless the hand which furnishes them with employment on reasonable terms, and occasionally dispenses seasonable relief. But if they feel themselves oppressed, merely that a few may be enabled to squander at pleasure, and to revel in wasteful excess, their discontents are not easily suppressed. With sullen murmurs they issue from their impoverished habitations, prepared for every evil work.

Such are some of the consequences which flow from dissipation and the intemperate love of pleasure. Let not the effect of what has been said be frustrated by this evasion, that although the descriptions which have been given be just and true, yet they are applicable only to such as have carried their pursuit of pleasure to the most criminal excess ; a class, in which few, if any, will admit that they deserve to be ranked. — They who are only beginning the course of vicious pleasure, and who sin

within prescribed bounds, may reckon with certainty on their bearing a share of the evils and miseries which I have described. Not only so, but having once entered on an irregular course, they cannot tell where they are to stop. They have drunk from the cup of the enchantress ; and being fairly brought within the magic circle, their powers of reflection are laid asleep, and to make an escape may not be in their power.

To some it may, perhaps, appear, that the whole strain of this discourse refers only to the rich and the great ; and that persons of moderate fortune, and of the middle ranks of life, who form the great body of society, have little or no concern in it. But this is entirely a mistake. Splendid fortune, and high birth or rank, afford, beyond doubt, the strongest and most frequent temptations to the loose indulgence of every enjoyment. But throughout all ranks the danger extends, of being misled by pleasure in some of its forms. In this country, where wealth and abundance are so much diffused over all stations ; where it is well known that the inferior orders of men are perpetually pressing upon those who are above them, and following them in their manners, a life of dissipation is perhaps not less frequent among the middle, than among the higher classes of society. The modes of amusement may not be so refined. The entertainments and pleasures may be of a grosser kind. But in many an inferior circle, there prevails as much love of pomp and show, as much proportional extravagance in expense, as much

rivalry in the competition of passions and pleasures, as in the most fashionable and courtly assemblies. Sober reflections are as much laid aside ; the gratification of vanity, and the indulgence of pleasure, are pursued with equal eagerness. — Let us, therefore, my brethren, in whatever rank of life we are placed, proceed upon this as our great principle, that to serve God, to attend to the serious cares of life, and to discharge faithfully the duties of our station, ought to be the first concern of every man who wishes to be wise and happy ; that amusement and pleasure are to be considered as the relaxation, not the business, of life ; and that if from those sentiments we depart, and give ourselves up to pleasure as our only object, “ even in laughter the heart shall be sorrowful, and the end of our mirth shall be heaviness.”

THOMAS CHALMERS, D.D.

Sermons preached in the Tron Church, Glasgow. Published by
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By permission of the publisher of these justly popular discourses, I have presented the reader with the two ensuing — each eminently characteristic of the genius of its Author. In the first, (which is comparatively short) from the excessive solemnity of the subject selected, there was necessarily less scope for vividness of imagery and eloquence of appeal; — but these are well dispensed with for the purity of the doctrine, and the thorough Christian-like spirit of exhortation and of comfort, which it imparts. It is altogether executed in a fine touching tone of pulpit-composition.

The second discourse gives the author every opportunity for the display of his powers of reasoning, declamation, and persuasion. There are highly wrought passages in it — such as at once characterise and adorn the most impassioned style of eloquence: — and although there are portions, in which the reader may very properly, and very justly, not go the entire length of the author, yet it must be readily admitted that the whole is a fine specimen of an ardent and generous feeling, upon a SUBJECT, on which perhaps, as little as any, the passions of mankind will allow them to draw moderate conclusions.

THE NECESSITY OF A MEDIATOR BETWEEN GOD AND MAN.

JOB, ix. 33.

Neither is there any day's-man betwixt us, that might lay his hand upon us both.

IV. THE feeling of Job, at the time of his uttering the complaint which is recorded in the verses before us, might not have been altogether free of a reproachful spirit towards those friends who had refused to advocate his cause, and who had even added bitterness to his distress by their most painful and unwelcome arguments. And well may it be our feeling, and that too without the presence of any such ingredient along with it — that there is not a man upon earth who can execute the office of a day's-man betwixt us and God, — that taking the common sense of this term, there is none who can act as an umpire between us, the children of ungodliness, and the Lawgiver whom we have so deeply offended, — or taking up the term that occurs in the Septuagint version of the Bible, that amongst all our brethren of the species, not an individual is to be found who, standing in the place of a mediator, can lay his hand upon us both. It is indeed very possible, that all this may carry the

understanding, and at the same time have all the inefficiency of a cold and general speculation. But should the Spirit, whose office it is to convince us of sin, lend the power of his demonstration to the argument, — should he divide asunder our thoughts, and enable us to see that with the goodly semblance of what is fair and estimable in the sight of man, all within us is defection from the principle of loyalty to God, — that while we yield a duty as the members of society, the duty that lies upon us, as the creatures of the supreme Being, is, in respect of the spirit of allegiance which gives it all its value, fallen away from by every one of us, — should this conviction cleave to us like an arrow sticking fast, and work its legitimate influence, in causing us to feel all the worthlessness of our characters, and all the need and danger of our circumstances, — then would the urgency of the case be felt as well as understood by us, — nor should we be long of pressing the enquiry of where is the day's-man betwixt us, that might lay his hand upon us both?

And, in fact, by putting the Mediator away from you, — by reckoning on a state of safety and acceptance without him, what is the ground upon which, in reference to God, you actually put yourselves? We speak not at present of the danger of persisting in such an attitude of independence, — of its being one of those refuges of treachery, in which the good man of the world is often to be found, — of its being a state wherein peace, when there is no peace, lulls him by his flatteries unto a

deceitful repose. We are not at present saying how ruinous it is to rest a security upon an imposing exterior, when, in, fact, the heart is not right in the sight of God, and while the reproving eye of Him, who judgeth not as man judgeth, is upon him, or how poisonous is the unction that comes upon the soul, from those praises which, upon the mere exhibition of the social virtues, are rung and circulated through society. But, in addition to the danger, let us insist upon the guilt of thus casting the offered Mediator away from us. It implies, in the most direct possible way, a sentiment of the sufficiency of our own righteousness. It is expressly saying of our obedience, that it is good enough for God. It is presumptuously thinking, that what pleases the world may please the Maker of it, even though he himself has declared it to be a world lying in wickedness. There is an aggravation, you will perceive, in all this which goes beyond the simple infraction of the commandment. It is, after the infraction of it, challenging for some remainder or for some semblance of conformity, the reward and approbation of the God whose law we have dishonoured. It is, after we have braved the attribute of the Almighty's justice, by incurring its condemnation, making an attempt upon the attribute itself, by bringing it down to the standard of a polluted obedience. It is, after insulting the throne of God's righteousness, embarking in the still deadlier enterprise of demolishing all the stabilities which guard it; and spoiling it of that truth which has

pronounced a curse on the children of iniquity, — of that holiness which cannot dwell with evil, — of that unchangeableness which will admit of no compromise with sinners that can violate the honours of the Godhead, or weaken the authority of his government over the universe that he has formed. It is laying those paltry accomplishments which give you a place of distinction among your fellows, before that God, of whose throne justice and judgment are the habitation; and calling upon him to connive at all that you want, and to look with complacency on all that you possess. It is to bring to the bar of judgment the poor and the starving samples of virtue, which are current enough in a world broken loose from its communion with God, and to defy the inspection upon them of God's eternal Son, and of the angels he brings along with him, to witness the righteousness of his decisions. Sin has indeed been the ruin of our nature — but this refusal of the Saviour of sinners lands them in a perdition still deeper and more irrecoverable. It is blindness to the enormity of sin: it is equivalent to a formally announced sentiment on your part, that your performances, sinful as they are, and polluted as they are, are good enough for heaven. It is just saying of the offered Saviour, that you do not see the use of him. It is a provoking contempt of mercy; and causing the measure of ordinary guilt to overflow, by heaping the additional blasphemy upon it, of calling upon God to honour it by his rewards, and to look to it with the complacency of his approbation.

We cannot, then, we cannot draw near unto God, by a direct or independent approach to him. And who, in these circumstances, is fit to be the day's-man betwixt you? There is not a fellow-mortal from Adam downward, who has not sins of his own to answer for. There is not one of them who has not the sentence of guilt inscribed upon his own forehead, and who is not arrested by the same unscaled barrier which keeps you at an inaccessible distance from God. There is not one of them whose entrance into the holiest of all would not inflict on it as great a profanation, as if any of you were to present yourselves before him, who dwelleth there, without a Mediator. There lieth a great gulf between God and the whole of this alienated world: and after looking round amongst all the men of all its generations, we may say, in the language of the text, that there is not a day's-man betwixt us who can lay his hand upon us both.

What we aim at, as the effect of all these observations, is, that you should feel your only security to be in the revealed and the offered Mediator; that you should seek to him as your only effectual hiding-place; and who alone, in the whole range of universal being, is able to lay his hand upon you, and shield you from the justice of the Almighty, and to lay his hand upon God, and stay the fury of the avenger. By him the deep atonement has been rendered. By him the mystery has been accomplished, which angels desired to look into. By him such a sacrifice for sin has been offered, as that, in

the acceptance of the sinner, every attribute of the Divinity is exalted; and the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, though turned into a throne of grace, is still upheld in all its firmness, and in all its glory. Through the unchangeable priesthood of Christ, the vilest of sinners may draw nigh, and receive of that mercy which has met with truth, and of that peace which is in close alliance with righteousness: and without one perfection of the Godhead being surrendered by this act of forgiveness, all are made to receive a higher and more wondrous manifestation: for though he will by no means clear the guilty, yet there is no place for vengeance, when all their guilt is cleared away by the blood of the everlasting covenant; and though he executeth justice upon the earth, yet he can be just, while the justifier of them who believe in Jesus.

The work of our redemption is every where spoken of as an achievement of strength, — as done by the putting forth of mighty energies, — as the work of one who, travailing in his own unaided greatness, had to tread the wine-press alone; and who, when of the people there was none to help him, did, by his own arm, bring unto him salvation. To move aside the obstacle which beset the path of acceptance, — to reinstate the guilty into favour with the offended and unchangeable Lawgiver, — to avert from them the execution of that sentence, to which there were staked the truth and justice of the Divinity, — to work out a pardon for the disobedient, and at the same time to uphold, in all their strength,

the pillars of that throne which they had insulted,—to intercept the defied penalties of the law, and at the same time, to magnify it, and to make it honourable ; — thus to bend, as it were, the holy and everlasting attributes of God, and in doing so, to pour over them the lustre of a high and awful vindication, — this was an enterprise of such height, and depth, and breadth, and length, as no created being could fulfil, and which called forth the might and the counsel of him who is the power of God, and the wisdom of God.

When no man could redeem his neighbour from the grave, God himself found out a ransom. When not one of the beings whom he had formed could offer an adequate expiation, did the Lord of hosts awaken the sword of vengeance against his fellow. When there was no messenger among the angels who surrounded his throne, that could both proclaim and purchase peace for a guilty world, did God manifest in the flesh descend in shrouded majesty amongst our earthly tabernacles, and pour out his soul unto the death for us, and purchase the church by his own blood, and bursting away from the grave which could not hold him, ascend to the throne of his appointed mediatorship ; and now he, the first and the last, who was dead and is alive, and maketh intercession for transgressors, is able to save to the uttermost all who come unto God through him ; and, standing in the breach between a holy God, and the sinners who have offended him, does he make reconciliation, and lay his hand upon them both.

But it is not enough that the Mediator be appointed by God,—he must be accepted by man. And to incite our acceptance does he hold forth every kind and constraining argument. He casts abroad, over the whole face of the world, one wide and universal assurance of welcome. “Whosoever cometh unto me shall not be cast out.” “Come unto me all ye who labour and are heavy laden, and I shall give you rest.” “Where sin hath abounded, grace hath much more abounded.” “Whatsoever ye ask in my name ye shall receive.” The path of access to Christ is open and free of every obstacle, which kept fearful and guilty men at an impracticable distance from the jealous and unpacified Lawgiver. He hath put aside the obstacle, and now stands in its place. Let us only go in the way of the Gospel, and we shall find nothing between us and God, but the author and finisher of the Gospel,—who, on the one hand, beckons to him the approach of man, with every token of truth and of tenderness ; and, on the other hand, advocates our cause with God, and fills his mouth with arguments, and pleads that very atonement which was devised in love by the Father, and with the incense of which he was well pleased, and claims, as the fruit of the travail of his soul, all who put their trust in him ; and thus, laying his hand upon God, turns him altogether from the fierceness of his indignation.

But Jesus Christ is something more than the agent of our justification,—he is the agent of our sanctification also. Standing between us and God,

he receives from him of that Spirit which is called the promise of the Father, and he pours it forth in free and generous dispensation on those who believe in him. Without this Spirit there may, in a few of the goodlier specimens of our race, be within us the play of what is kindly in constitutional feeling, and without us the exhibition of what is seemly in a constitutional virtue; and man, thus standing over us in judgment, may pass his verdict of approbation; and all that is visible in our doings may be pure as by the operation of snow-water. But the utter irreligiousness of our nature will remain as entire and as obstinate as ever. The alienation of our desires from God will persist with unsubdued vigour in our bosoms; and sin, in the very essence of its elementary principle, will still lord it over the inner man with all the power of its original ascendancy,—till the deep, and the searching, and the prevailing influence of the love of God be shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost. This is the work of the great Mediator. This is the might and the mystery of that regeneration, without which we shall never see the kingdom of God. This is the office of Him to whom all power is committed, both in heaven and in earth,—who, reigning in heaven, and uniting its mercy with its righteousness, causes them to flow upon earth in one stream of celestial influence; and reigning on earth, and working mightily in the hearts of its people, makes them meet for the society of heaven,—thereby completing the wonderful work of our redemption, by which, on the one hand, he

brings the eye of a holy God to look approvingly on the sinner, and, on the other hand, makes the sinner fit for the fellowship, and altogether prepared for the enjoyment of God.

Such are the great elements of a sinner's religion. But if you turn from the prescribed use of them, the wrath of God abideth on you. If you kiss not the Son while he is in the way, you provoke his anger; and when once it begins to burn, they only are blessed who have put their trust in him. If, on the fancied sufficiency of a righteousness that is without godliness, you neglect the great salvation, you will not escape the severities of that day, when the Being with whom you have to do shall enter with you into judgment; and it is only by fleeing to the Mediator, as you would from a coming storm, that peace is made between you and God, and that, sanctified by the faith which is in Jesus, you are made to abound in such fruits of righteousness, as shall be to praise and glory at the last and the solemn reckoning.

Before we conclude, we shall just advert to another sense, in which the Mediator between God and man may be affirmed to have laid his hand upon them both:—he fills up that mysterious interval which lies between every corporeal being, and the God who is a spirit and is invisible.

No man hath seen God at any time,—and the power which is unseen is terrible. Fancy trembles before its own picture, and superstition throws its darkest imagery over it. The voice of the thunder

is awful, but not so awful as the conception of that angry Being who sits in mysterious concealment, and gives it all its energy. In these sketches of the imagination, fear is sure to predominate. We gather an impression of Nature's God, from those scenes where Nature threatens, and looks dreadful. We speak not of the theology of the schools, and the empty parade of its demonstrations. We speak of the theology of actual feeling, — that theology which is sure to derive its lessons from the quarter whence the human heart derives its strongest sensations — and we refer both to your own feelings, and to the history of this world's opinions, if God is more felt or more present to your imaginations in the peacefulness of spring or the loveliness of a summer landscape, than when winter with its mighty elements sweeps the forest of its leaves, — when the rushing of the storm is heard upon our windows, and man flees to cover himself from the desolation that walketh over the surface of the world.

If nature and her elements be dreadful, how dreadful that mysterious and unseen Being, who sits behind the elements he has formed, and gives birth and movement to all things! It is the mystery in which he is shrouded, — it is that dark and unknown region of spirits, where he reigns in glory, and stands revealed to the immediate view of his worshippers, — it is the inexplicable manner of his being so far removed from that province of sense, within which the understanding of a man can expatiate, — it is its total unlikeness to all that

nature can furnish to the eye of the body, or to the conception of the mind which animates it, — it is all this which throws the Being who formed us at a distance so inaccessible, — which throws an impenetrable mantle over his way, and gives us the idea of some dark and untrodden interval betwixt the glory of God, and all that is visible and created.

Now, Jesus Christ has lifted up this mysterious veil, or rather he has entered within it. He is now at the right hand of God ; and though the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person, he appeared to us in the palpable characters of a man ; and those attributes of truth, and justice, and mercy, which could not be felt or understood, as they existed in the abstract and invisible Deity, are brought down to our conceptions in a manner the most familiar and impressive, by having been made, through Jesus Christ, to flow in utterance from human lips, and to beam in expressive physiognomy from a human countenance.

So long as I had nothing before me but the unseen Spirit of God, my mind wandered in uncertainty, my busy fancy was free to expatiate, and its images filled my heart with disquietude and terror. But in the life, and person, and history of Jesus Christ, the attributes of the Deity are brought down to the observation of the senses ; and I can no longer mistake them, when in the Son, who is the express image of his Father, I see them carried home to my understanding by the evidence and expression of human organs, — when I see the kindness

of the Father, in the tears which fell from his Son at the tomb of Lazarus, — when I see his justice blended with his mercy, in the exclamation, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem!” by Jesus Christ; uttered with a tone more tender than the sympathy of human bosom ever prompted, while he bewailed the sentence of its desolation, and in the look of energy and significance which he threw upon Peter; I feel the judgment of God himself, flashing conviction upon my conscience, and calling me to repent while his wrath is suspended, and he still waiteth to be gracious.

And it was not a temporary character which he assumed. The human kindness, and the human expression which makes it intelligible to us, remained with him till his latest hour. They survived his resurrection, and he has carried them along with him to the mysterious place which he now occupies. How do I know all this? I know it from his history, — I hear it in the parting words to his mother from the cross, — I see it in his unaltered form when he rose triumphant from the grave, — I perceive it in his tenderness for the scruples of the unbelieving Thomas, — and I am given to understand, that as his body retained the impression of his own sufferings, so his mind retains a sympathy for ours, as warm, and gracious, and endearing, as ever. We have a Priest on high, who is touched with a fellow feeling of our infirmities. My soul, unable to support itself in its ærial flight amongst the spirits of the invisible, now reposes on Christ, who stands

revealed to my conceptions in the figure, the countenance, the heart, the sympathies of a man. He has entered within that veil which hung over the glories of the Eternal, — and the mysterious inaccessible throne of God is divested of all its terrors, when I think that a friend who bears the form of the species, and knows its infirmities, is there to plead for me.

EMPTINESS OF NATURAL VIRTUE.

JOHN, v. 24.

But I know you, that ye have not the love of God in you.

WHEN it is said, in a former verse of the gospel, that Jesus knew what was in man, we feel, that it is a tribute of acknowledgment rendered to his superior insight into the secrecies of our constitution. It was not the mere faculty of perceiving what lay before him, that was ascribed to him by the Evangelist. It was the faculty of perceiving what lay disguised under a semblance that would have imposed on the understanding of other men ; it was the faculty of detecting. It was a discerning of the spirit, and that not through the transparency of such unequivocal symptoms as brought its character clearly home to the view of the observer ; but it was a discerning of the spirit as it lay wrapt in what, to an ordinary spectator, was a thick and impenetrable hiding-place. It was a discovery there of the real posture and habitude of the soul. It was a searching of it out, through all the recesses of duplicity, winding and counterwinding in such a way as to elude altogether the eye of common

acquaintanceship. It was the assigning to it of one attribute, at the time when it wore the guise of another attribute, — of utter antipathy to the nature and design of his mission, at the very time that multitudes were drawn around him by the fame of his miracles, — of utter indifference about God, at the very time that they zealously asserted the sanctity of his sabbaths, and resented as blasphemous whatever they felt to be an usurpation of the greatness which belonged to him only.

It was in the exercise of this faculty that Jesus came forward with the utterance of our text. The Jews, by whom he was surrounded, had charged him with the guilt of profanation, and sought even to avenge it by his death, because he had healed a man on the sabbath day. And their desire of vengeance was still more inflamed by what they understood to be an assertion, on his part, of equality with God. And yet, under all this appearance, and even with all this reality of a zeal about God, did He who knew what was in man pronounce of these his enemies, that the love of God was not in them. I know you, says he, — as if at this instant he had put forth a stretch of penetration, in order to find his way through all the sounds of godliness which he heard, and through all the symptoms of godliness which he saw, — I know that there does not exist within you that principle, which links to God the whole of God's obedient creation, — I know that you do not love him, and that, therefore, you are utterly in want of that affection which lies at the root of all real, and of all acceptable godliness.

It is mortifying to the man who possesses many accomplishments of character, to be told, that the greatest and most essential accomplishment of a moral being is that of which he has no share,—that the principle on which we expatiated in our last discourses does not, in any of its varieties, belong to him, — that, wanting it, he wants not merely obedience to the first and the greatest commandment, which is the love of God, but he wants what may be called the impregnating quality of all acceptable obedience whatever, — the spirit which ought to animate the performance of every other commandment, and without which the most labourious conformity to the law of Heaven may do no more than impress upon his person the cold and lifeless image of loyalty, while in his mind there is not one of its essential attributes.

We know not a more useful exercise, than that of carrying round this conviction, amongst all the classes and conditions of humanity. In the days of our Saviour, the pride of the Pharisees stood opposed to such a demonstration; and in our own days too, there are certain pretensions of worth and of excellence which must be disposed, ere we can hope to obtain admittance for the humiliating doctrine of the gospel. For this gospel, it must be observed, proceeds upon the basis, not of a partial, but of an entire and universal depravity, among the men of the world. It assimilates all the varieties of the human character into one common condition of guilt, and need, and helplessness. It presumes the

existence of such a moral disease in every son and daughter of Adam, as renders the application of the same moral remedy indispensable to them all. The formalists of Judea did not like to be thus grouped with publicans and harlots, under one description of sinfulness. Nor do men of taste, and feeling, and graceful morality, in our present day, readily understand how they should require the same kind of treatment, in the work of preparing them for immortality, with the most glaringly profligate and unrighteous of their neighbourhood. They look to the ostensible marks of distinction between themselves and others;—and what wider distinction, they think, can possibly be assigned, than that which obtains between the upright, or the kind-hearted, on the one hand, and the ungenerous, or dishonest, on the other? Now, what we propose, in the following discourse, is to lead them to look a little farther,—and then they will see at least one point of similarity between these two classes, the want of one common ingredient with both, and which attaches to each of them a great moral defect, that can only be repaired by one and the same application.

It is well when we can find out an accordancy between the actual exhibition of human nature on the field of experience, and the representation that is given of this nature on the field of revelation. Now, the Bible every where groups the individuals of our species into two general and distinct classes, and assigns to each of them its appropriate designation. It tells us of the vessels of wrath, and of the vessels of

mercy ; of the travellers on a narrow path, and on a broad way ; of the children of this world, and the children of light ; and, lastly, of men who are carnally minded, and men who are spiritually minded. It employs these terms in a meaning so extensive, that by each couplet of them it embraces all individuals. There is no separate number of persons, forming of themselves a neutral class, and standing without the limits of the two others. And were it possible to conceive that human nature, as it exists at present in the world, were laid in a map before us, you would see no intermediate ground between the two classes which are thus contrasted in the Bible, — but these thrown into two distinct regions, with one clear and vigorous line of demarcation between them.

We often read of this line, and we often read of the transition from the one to the other side of it. But there is no trace of any middle department to be met with in the New Testament. The alternative has only two terms, and ours must be the one or the other of them. And as surely as a day is coming, when all the men of our assembled world shall be found on the right or on the left hand of the throne of judgment — so surely do the carnal and the spiritual regions of human nature stand apart from each other, and all the men who are now living on the surface of the world are to be found on the right, or on the wrong side, of the line of demarcation.

We cannot conceive, then, a question of mightier

interest, than the situation of this line,—a line which takes its own steady and unfaltering way through the thousand varieties of character that exist in the world; and which reduces them all to two great, and awfully important divisions. It marks off one part of the species from the other. We are quite aware that the terms which are employed to characterise the two sets are extremely unfashionable; and, what is more, are painfully offensive to many a mind whose taste, and whose habits, have not yet been brought under the overpowering control of God's own message, expressed in God's own language. They are such terms as would be rejected with a positive sensation of disgust by many a moralist, and would be thought by many more, to impart the blemish of a most hideous deformity to his eloquent and philosophical pages. It is curious here to observe how much the Maker of the human mind, and the mere observer of the human mind, differ in their views and representations of the same object. But when told, on the highest of all authority, that to be carnally minded is death, and to be spiritually minded is life and peace, we are compelled to acknowledge, with a feeling of earnestness greater than mere curiosity can inspire, that the application of these terms is a question of all others the most deeply affecting to the fears and the wishes of humanity.

In the prosecution of this question, let me attempt to bring a succession of characters before you, most of which must have met your own distinct and fami-

liar observation; and of which, while exceedingly various in their complexion, we hope to succeed in convincing you, that the love of God, at least, is not in them. If this can be made out against them, it may be considered as experimentally fixing to which of the two great divisions of humanity they belong. All who love God may have boldness when they think of the day of judgment, because, like unto God, who himself is love, they will be pronounced meet for the enjoyment and the fellowship of him through eternity. And they who want this affection, when they die shall be turned into hell. They shall be found to possess that carnal mind which is enmity against God. So that upon the single point of whether they possess this love or not, hinges the question which I have just now started,—a question, surely, which it were better for every man to decide at the bar of conscience now, ere it comes under the review of that dread tribunal which is to award to him his everlasting habitation.

I. Let us first offer to your notice a man living in the grossness of animal indulgence,—a man, the field of whose enjoyments is altogether sensual, and who therefore, in addition to the charge he brings down upon himself, of directly violating the law of God, is regarded by the admirers of what is tasteful and refined in the human character as a loathsome object of contemplation. There is something more here, than mere wickedness of character, to excite the regret or detestation of the godly. There is a sordidness of character to excite the disgust of the

elegant. And let us just add one feature more to this portrait of deformity. Let us suppose the man in question to have so abandoned himself to the impulses of selfishness, that no feeling and no principle whatever restrains him from yielding to its temptations,—that, to obtain the gratification he is in quest of, he can violate all the decencies, and bid away from him all the tendernesses of our common humanity,—that he has the hardihood to set the terrors of the civil law at defiance, — and that, for the money which ministers to every earthly appetite, he can even go so far as to steel his heart against the atrocity of a murder. When we have thus set before you the picture of one feasting on the prey of his inhuman robberies, we have surely brought our description as far down in the scale of character as it can well be carried. And we have done so, on purpose that you may be at no loss to assign the place which belongs to him. It were a monstrous supposition altogether, that either the love of gratitude, or the love of moral esteem for the Deity, were to be found in the bosom of such a man. He then, of all others, is not spiritual but carnal ; nor do we anticipate a single dissenting voice when we say, that whatever be the doubts and the delusions which may prevail about men of another aspect, the man whose habits and pursuits have now been sketched to you stands on the wrong side of the line of demarcation.

We are far from saying, that a man of such a character as this is of frequent occurrence in society. We merely set him up as a kind of start-

ing-post, for the future train of our argument. It is a mighty advantage, in every discussion, to have a clear and undisputed outset,—and we trust that, if thus far we have kept cordially by the side of each other, we shall not cast out by the way, in the progress of our remaining observations.

II. Let us now proceed, then, to detach one offensive feature from the character of him, whom we have thus set before you as a compound of many abominations. Let us leave entire all his dishonesty, and all his devotedness to the pleasures of sense, but soften and transform his heart to such a degree, that he would recoil from the perpetration of a murder. This is a different portrait from the one which we formerly exhibited. There is in it an instinctive horror at an act of violence, which did not belong to the other;—and the question we have now to put is, Has the man who owns this improved representation, become, on this single difference, a spiritual man? We answer this question by another. Is the difference that we have now assigned to him due to the love of God, or to such a principle of loyal subjection to his authority as this love is sure to engender? You will not call him spiritual from the mere existence of a feeling which would rise spontaneously in his heart, even though the Father of spirits were never thought of. We appeal to your own consciousness of what passes within you, if the heart do not experience the movement of many a constitutional feeling, altogether unaccompanied by any reference of the

mind to the love, or to the character, or even to the existence of God. Are you not quite sensible, that though the idea of a God lay in a state of dormancy for hours, and for days together, many of the relentings of nature would, in the mean while, remain with you? For the preservation and the order of society, God has been kind enough to implant in the bosom of man many a natural predilection, and many a natural horror,—of which he feels the operation, and the people of his neighbourhood enjoy the advantage, at the very time that one and all of them, unmindful of God, are walking in the counsel of their own hearts, and after the sight of their own eyes. He has done the same thing to the inferior animals. He has endowed them with a principle of attachment to their offspring, in virtue of which they, generally speaking, would recoil from the murder of their young with as determined an abhorrence as you would do from the murder of a fellow creature. You would not surely say of the irrational instinct, that, because amiable, or useful, or pleasing to contemplate, there is any thing spiritual in the impulse it communicates. Then do not offer a violence both to Scripture and philosophy, by confounding, in the mind of man, principles which are distinct from each other. Do not say, that he is spiritual, merely because he is moving in obedience to his constitutional tendencies. Do not say, that he is not carnal, while all that he has done, or abstained from doing, may be done or abstained from, though he lived without God in the

world. And go not to infer, while the pleasures of sense are the idols of his every affection — that because he would shudder to purchase them at the expense of another's blood, he, on that single account, may be looked on as a spiritual man, and as standing on the right side of the line of demarcation.

III. All this may be looked upon as too indisputable for argument. And yet it is the very principle which, if carried to its fair extent, and brought faithfully home to the conscience, would serve to convince of ungodliness the vast majority of this world's generations. If a natural recoil from murder may be experienced by the bosom in which there exists no love to God, — why may not this natural recoil be carried still farther, and yet the love of God be just as absent from the bosom as before? There are other dishonesties, of a far less outrageous character than that by which you would commit an act of depredation, and other cruelties far less enormous than that by which you would imbrue your hand in another's blood, — which still the generality of men would revolt from constitutionally, and that too, without the movement of any affection for their God, or even so much as any thought of him. We have only to conceive the softening of a farther transformation to take place on the man with whom we set out at the beginning of our argument, and he may thus become, like the man we read of in the parable, who took comfort to himself in the security that he had goods laid up for many

years, and at the same time is not charged either with violence or dishonesty in the acquirement of them. He is charged with nothing but a devoted attachment to wealth, and to the pleasures which that wealth can purchase. And yet, what an awful reckoning did he come under ! He seems to have just been such a man as we can be at no loss to meet with every day in the range of our familiar acquaintances, — enjoying themselves in easy and comfortable abundance, but at an obvious and unquestionable distance from any thing that can be called atrocity of character. There is not one of them, perhaps, who would not recoil from an act of barbarity, and who would not be moved with honest indignation at the tale of perfidy or of violence. They live in a placid course of luxury and good humour ; and we are far from charging them with any thing which the world calls monstrous, when we say, that the Father of spirits is unminded and unregarded by them, and that the good things of the world are their gods. If it be a vain superfluity of argument to prove, that a man may not be spiritual, and yet be endowed with such a degree of natural tenderness as to recoil from the perpetration of a murder, — then it is equally indisputable, that a man may not be spiritual, though endowed with such a degree of natural tenderness as to recoil from many lesser acts of cruelty or injustice. In other words, he may be a very fair every-day character : and if it be so sure a principle, that a man may not be a murderer, and yet be carnal, then let

one and all of you look well to your own security ; for it is the very principle which might be employed to shake the thousands, and tens of thousands of ordinary men, out of the security in which they have intrenched themselves.

IV. But to proceed in this work of transformation. Let us now conceive a still more exquisite softening of affection and tenderness to be thrown over the whole of our imaginary character. We thus make another step, and another departure, from the original specimen. By the first step, the mind is made to feel a kind of revolting at the atrocity of a murder ; and the character ceases to be monstrous. By the second, the mind is made to share in all the common antipathies of our nature to what is cruel and unfeeling ; and it is thus wrought up to the average of character which obtains in society. By the third step, the mind is endowed with the warmer and more delicate sympathies of our nature, and thus rises to a more exalted place in the scale of character ; it becomes positively amiable. You look to him who owns all these graceful sensibilities, even as the Saviour looked upon the young man of the gospels, and, like the Saviour, you love him. Who can, in fact, refrain from doing homage to such a lovely exhibition of all that is soothing in humanity ? and whether he be employed in mingling his tears and his charities with the unfortunate, or in shedding a gentle lustre over the retirement of his own family, even orthodoxy herself, stern and unrelenting as she is conceived to be, cannot find it

in her heart to frown upon him. But, feeling is one thing, and truth is another; and when the question is put, Do all these sensibilities, heightened and adorned as they are, on the upper walks of society, constitute a spiritual man? — it is not by a sigh, or an aspiration of tenderness, that we are to answer it. We are put on a cool exercise of the understanding; and we cannot close it against the fact, that all these feelings may exist apart from the love of God, and apart from the religious principle,—that the idea of a God may be expunged from the heart of man, and yet that heart be still the seat of the same constitutional impulses as ever,—that, in reference to the realities of the unseen and spiritual world, the mind may be an entire blank, and there at the same time be room in it for the play of kindly and benevolent emotions. We commit these truths to your own experience, and if carried faithfully to the conscience, they may chase away another of the delusions which encompass it. There is no fear of me, for I have a feeling heart, is a plea which they put a decisive end to. This feeling heart, if unaccompanied by any sense of God, is no better evidence of a spiritual man than is the circulation of the blood. We are far from refusing it the homage of our tenderness. We feel a love to it; but we will not make a lie about it. We can make no more of it than Scripture and experience enable us to do. And if it be true, that a man's heart may be the habitual seat of kind affections, while an affection for God is habitually away from it, — if it be true,

that no man can be destitute of this affection, and at the same time be a spiritual man, — if it be true, that he who is not spiritual is carnal, and that the carnally-minded cannot inherit the kingdom of God ; — then the necessity lies upon us : he is still in the region and shadow of death ; and if he refuse the arguments and invitations of the gospel, calling him over to another region than that which he now occupies, he must just be numbered among those more beauteous wrecks of our fallen nature, which are destined to perish and be forgotten.

V. But let us go still farther. Let us suppose the heart to be furnished, not merely with the finest sensibilities of our nature, but with its most upright and honourable principles. Let us conceive a man whose pulse beats high with the pride of integrity ; whose every word carries security along with it ; whose faithfulness in the walks of business has stood the test of many fluctuations ; who, amid all the varieties of his fortune, has nobly sustained the glories of an untainted character ; and whom we see, by the salutations of the market-place, to be acknowledged and revered by all as the most respectable of the citizens. Now, which of the two great regions of human character shall we make him to occupy ? This question depends upon another. May all this manly elevation of soul, and of sentiment, stand disunited in the same heart with the influence of the authority of God, or with that love of God which is the keeping of his commandments ? The discerning eye of Hume saw that it could ; and

he tells us that natural honesty of temper is a better security for the faithfulness of a man's doings, than all the authority of religious principle over him. We deny the assertion; but the distinction between the two principles on which it proceeds, is indisputable. There is a principle of honour, apart in the human mind altogether from any reference to the realities of a spiritual world. It varies in the intensity of its operation with different individuals. It has the chance of being more entire, when kept aloof from the temptations of poverty; and therefore it is that we more frequently meet with it in the upper and middling classes of life. And we can conceive it so strong in its original influence, or so grateful to the possessor from the elevating consciousness which goes along with it, or so nourished by the voice of an applauding world, as to throw all the glories of a romantic chivalry over the character of him, with whom God is as much unthought of as he is unseen. We are far from refusing our admiration. But we are saying, that the Being who brought this noble specimen of our nature into existence; who fitted his heart for all its high and generous emotions; who threw a theatre around him for the display and exercise of his fine moral accomplishments; who furnished each of his admirers with a heart to appreciate his worth, and a voice to pour into his ear the flattering expression of it;—the Being whose hand upholds and perpetuates the whole of this illustrious exhibition, may all the while be forgotten and unnoticed as a thing

of no consequence. We are merely saying, that the man whose heart is occupied with a sentiment of honour, and is at the same time unoccupied with a sense of Him who is the first and greatest of spiritual beings, is not a spiritual man. But, if not spiritual, we are told in the Bible that there are only two terms in the alternative, and he must be carnal. And the God whom he has disregarded in time will find, that in the praises and enjoyments of time he has gotten all his reward, and that he owes him no recompense in eternity.

We appeal to the state of the public mind some years ago on the subject of Africa, as a living exemplification of the whole argument. "Love thy neighbour as thyself," says the Bible; and this precept, coming with all the force of its religious influence upon the hearts of men who carry their respects to the will of a spiritual and unseen God, has urged them on, and with noble effect, to the abolition of the deadliest mischief that was ever let loose upon the species. And whether we look to the Quakers, who originated the cause, or to him who pioneered the cause, or to him who pled the cause, or to him who has impregnated with such a moral charm the atmosphere of his country, that not a human creature can breathe of its air without taking in the generous inspiration of liberty along with it, we cannot fail to observe that one and all of them speak the language and evince the tastes, and are not ashamed to own their most entire and decided preference, for the objects of spiritual men. There

is an evident sense of religious duty, which gives the tone of Christianity, and throws the aspect of sacredness over the whole of their doings; and the unbaffled perseverance of the many years they had to struggle with difficulties, and to spend in the weariness of ever-recurring disappointments, bears striking proof to the unquestionable energy of the Christian principle within them. But who can deny the large and important contributions which came in upon the cause from other quarters? We hold it quite consistent with the truth of human nature to aver, that, in this enlightened country, other principles may have lent their aid to the cause, and, apart from Christianity altogether, may have sent a commanding influence into the hearts of some of its ablest and most efficient supporters. There is nothing in the presence of Christian principle to quell the impassioned fervour of our desires after right objects; but the absence of Christian principle does not necessarily extinguish this fervour. When we look back to the animating ferment of the British public on the subject of Africa, we will ever contend, that a feeling of obligation to a spiritual Being was the ingredient which set it a-going, and which kept it a-going. But who can deny the existence and the powerful operation of other ingredients? An instinctive horror at cruelty is a separate and independent attribute of the heart, and sufficient of itself to inspire the deepest tones of that eloquence which sounded in Parliament and issued from the press, and spread an infection over all the provinces

of the empire, and mustered around the cause, thousands and tens of thousands of our rallying population, and gave such an energy to the public voice that all the resisting jealousies and interests of the country were completely overborne;—and hence the interesting spectacle of carnal and spiritual men lending their respective energies to the accomplishment of one object, and securing, by their success, a higher name for Britain in the world than all the wisdom of her counsels, and all the pride of her victories, can ever achieve for her.

Were it our only aim to carry the acquiescence of the understanding, there might be a danger in affirming, and urging, and illustrating to excess, the position that we want to establish among you;—and it were perhaps better, to limit ourselves to one simple delivery of the argument. But our aim is, if possible, to affect the conscience, and to accomplish this object, not with one, but with many individuals. And when it is reflected, that one development of the principle may come home more forcibly to one man's experience than another, we must beg to be excused for recurring once more to a topic so pregnant of consequence to your everlasting interests. There is a sadly meagre and frivolous conception of human sinfulness, that is prevalent amongst you, and it goes to foster this delusion, that when we look abroad on the face of society, we must be struck with the diversity of character which obtains among the individuals who compose it. Some there are who, in the estimation of the world, are execrable

for their crimes; but others who, in the same estimation, are illustrious for their virtues. In that general mass of corruption to which we would reduce our unfortunate species, is there, it may be asked, no solitary example of what is pure, and honourable, and lovely? Do we never meet with the charity which melts at suffering; with the honesty which disdains, and is proudly superior to, falsehood; with the active beneficence which gives to others its time and its labour; with the modesty which shrinks from notice, and gives all its sweetness to retirement; with the gentleness which breathes peace to all, and throws a beautiful lustre over the walks of domestic society? If we find these virtues to be sometimes exhibited, is not this an argument against the doctrine of such an entire and unmitigated depravity as we have been contending for? Will it not serve to redeem humanity from that sweeping indiscriminate charge of corruption, which is so often advanced against it, in all the pride and intolerance of orthodoxy? What better evidence can be given of our love to God than our adherence to his law? And are not the virtues which we have just now specified part of that law? Are not they the very virtues which his authority requires of us, and which impart such a charm to the morality of the New Testament? 3

Now, it carries us at once to the bottom of this delusion, to observe, that though the religious principle can never exist without the amiable and virtuous conduct of the New Testament; yet, that conduct

may, in some measure be maintained, without the religious principle. A man may be led to precisely the same conduct, on the impulse of many different principles. He may be gentle, because it is a prescription of the divine law;—or, he may be gentle, because he is naturally of a peaceful or indolent constitution;—or, he may be gentle, because he sees it to be an amiable gracefulness, with which he wishes to adorn his own character;—or, he may be gentle, because it is the ready way of perpetuating the friendship of those around him;—or, he may be gentle, because taught to observe it as a part of courtly and fashionable deportment,—and what was implanted by education may come in time to be confirmed by habit and experience. Now, it is only under the first of these principles, that there is any religion in gentleness. The other principles may produce all the outward appearance of this virtue, and much even of its inward complacency, and yet be as distinct from the religious principle as they are distinct from one another. To infer the strength of the religious principle from the taste of the human mind for what is graceful and lovely in character, would just be as preposterous as to infer it from the admiration of a fine picture or a cultivated landscape. They are not to be confounded. They occupy a different place, even in the classifications of philosophy. We do not deny, that the admiration of what is fine in character is a principle of a higher order than the admiration of what is fine in external scenery. So is a taste for

what is beautiful in the prospect before us, a principle of a higher order, than a taste for the sensualities of the epicure. But they, one and all of them, stand at a wide distance from the religious principle: and whether it be taste, or temper, or the love of popularity, or the high impulse of honourable feeling, or even the love of truth, and a natural principle of integrity, — the virtues in question may be so unconnected with religion, as to flourish in the world, and be rewarded by its admiration, even though God were expunged from the belief, and immortality from the prospects, of the species.

The virtues, then, to which the enemies of our doctrine make such a confident appeal, may have no force whatever in the argument, — because, properly speaking, they may not be exemplifications of the religious principle. If you do what is virtuous because God tells you so, then, and then only, do you give us a fair example of the authority of religion over your practice: but, if you do it merely because it is lovely, because it is honourable, or because it is a fine moral accomplishment, — we will not refuse the testimony of our admiration, but we cannot submit to such an error, either of conception or of language, as to allow that there is any religion in all this. These qualities have our utmost friendship; and we give the most substantial evidence of this, when, instead of leaving them to their own solitary claims upon the human heart, we call in the aid of religion, and support them by its authority: “Whatsoever things are pure, or lovely, or honest,

or of good report; if there be any virtue, if there be any praise, think of these things." But we will not admit, that the mere circumstance of their being lovely supersedes the authority of religion; nor can we endure such an injustice to the Author of all that is graceful, both in nature and morality, as that the native charms of virtue should usurp, in our admiration, the place of God — of him who gave to virtue all its charms, and formed the heart of man to love and to admire them.

Be not deceived, then, into a rejection of that doctrine which forms the great basis of a sinner's religion, by the specimens of moral excellence which are to be met with in society; or by the praise which your own virtues extort from an applauding neighbourhood. Virtue may exist, and in such a degree, too, as to constitute it a lovely object in the eyes of the world; but if there be in it no reference of the mind to the will of God, there is no religion in it. Such virtue as this has its reward in its natural consequences,—in the admiration of others, or in the delights of conscious satisfaction. But we cannot see why God will reward it in the capacity of your master, when his service was not the principle of it, and you were therefore not acting at all the part of a servant to him,—nor do we see how he can reward it in the capacity of your judge, when, in the whole process of virtuous feeling, and virtuous sentiment, and virtuous conduct, you carried in your heart no reference whatever, for a single moment, to him as to your lawgiver. We do not deny that there

are many such examples of virtue in the world ; but then we insist upon it, that they cannot be put down to the account of religion. They often may, and actually do, exist in a state of entire separation from the religious principle ; and in that case, they go no farther than to prove that your taste is unvitiated, that your temper is amiable, that your social dispositions promote the peace and welfare of society ; and they will be rewarded with its approbation. Now, it is well that you act your part as a member of society ; and religion, by making this one of its injunctions, gives us the very best security, that, wherever its influence prevails, it will be done in the most perfect manner. But the point we labour to impress is, that a man may be what we all understand by a good member of society, without the authority of God, as his legislator, being either recognised or acted upon. We do not say that his error lies in being a good member of society. This, though only a circumstance at present, is a very fortunate one. The error lies in his having discarded the authority of God, or rather, in his never having admitted the influence of that authority over his heart, or his practice. We want to guard him against the delusion, that the principle which he has can never be accepted as a substitute for the principle he has not, — or, that the very highest sense of duty, which his situation as a member of society impresses upon his feelings, will ever be received as an atonement for wanting that sense of duty to God, which he ought to feel in the far more exalted capa-

city of his servant, and candidate for his approbation. We stand on the high ground, that he is the subject of the Almighty, — nor shall we shrink from declaring the whole extent of the principle. Let his path in society be ever so illustrious, by the virtues which adorn it; let every word, and every performance, be as honourable as a proud sense of integrity can make it; let the salutations of the market-place mark him out as the most respectable of the citizens; and the gratitude of a thousand families ring the praises of his beneficence to the world: — if the actor in this splendid exhibition carry in his mind no reference to the authority of God, we do not hesitate to pronounce him unworthy; nor shall all the execrations of generous, but mistaken principle, deter us from putting forth our hand to strip him of his honours. What! is the world to gaze in admiration on this fine spectacle of virtue, and are we to be told that the Being who gave such faculties to one of his children, and provides the theatre for their exercise, — that the Being who called this moral scene into existence, and gave it all its beauties, — that he is to be forgotten and neglected as of no consequence? Shall we give a deceitful lustre to the virtues of him who is unmindful of his God, — and with all the grandeur of eternity before us, can we turn to admire those short-lived exertions, which only shed a fleeting brilliancy over a paltry and perishable scene? It is true, that he who is counted faithful in little will also be counted faithful in much; and when God is the principle of this

fidelity, the very humblest wishes of benevolence will be rewarded. But its most splendid exertions without this principle have no inheritance in heaven: human praise and human eloquence may acknowledge it, but the Discerner of the heart never will. The heart may be the seat of every amiable feeling, and every claim which comes to it in the shape of human misery may find a welcome; but if the love of God be not there, it is not right with God, — and he who owns it will die in his sins; he is in a state of impenitency.

Having thus disposed of those virtues which exist in a state of independence on the religious principle, we must be forced to recur to the doctrine of human depravity, in all its original aggravation. Man is corrupt, and the estrangement of his heart from God, is the decisive evidence of it. Every day of his life the first commandment of the law is trampled on, — and it is that commandment on which the authority of the whole is suspended. His best exertions are unsound in their very principle; and as the love of God reigns not within him, all that has usurped the name of virtue, and deceived us by its semblance, must be a mockery and a delusion.

We shall conclude with three observations. First, there is nothing more justly fitted to revolt the best feelings of the human heart against orthodoxy, than when any thing is said in its defence which tends to mar the credit or lustre of a moral accomplishment so lovely as benevolence. Let it be observed,

then, that substantial benevolence is rarely, if ever, to be found apart from piety,—and that piety is but the hypocrisy of a name, when benevolence, in all the unweariedness of its well doing, does not go along with it. Benevolence may make some brilliant exhibitions of herself without the instigation of the religious principle; but, in these cases, you seldom have the touchstone of a painful sacrifice,—and you never have a spiritual aim, after the good of our imperishable nature. It is easy to indulge a constitutional feeling. It is easy to make a pecuniary surrender. It is easy to move gently along, amid the visits and the attentions of kindness, when every eye smiles welcome, and the soft whispers of gratitude minister their pleasing reward, and flatter you into the delusion that you are an angel of mercy. But give us the benevolence of him who can ply his faithful task in the face of every discouragement,—who can labour in scenes where there is no brilliancy whatever to reward him,—whose kindness is that sturdy and abiding principle which can weather all the murmurs of ingratitude, and all the provocations of dishonesty,—who can find his way through poverty's putrid lanes, and depravity's most nauseous and disgusting receptacles,—who can maintain the uniform and placid temper within the secresy of his own home, and amid the irksome annoyances of his own family,—who can endure hardships, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus,—whose humanity acts with as much vigour amid the reproach, and the calumny, and the contradiction of sinners, as when soothed

and softened by the poetic accompaniment of weeping orphans and interesting cottages, — and, above all, who labours to convert sinners, to subdue their resistance of the Gospel, and to spiritualise them into a meetness for the inheritance of the saints. We maintain, that no such benevolence, realising all these features, exists, without a deeply seated principle of piety lying at the bottom of it. Walk from Dan to Beersheba, and, away from Christianity, and beyond the circle of its influences, there is positively no such benevolence to be found. The patience, the meekness, the difficulties of such a benevolence, cannot be sustained without the influence of a heavenly principle, — and when all that decks the theatre of this world is withdrawn, what else is there but the magnificence of eternity to pour a glory over its path, and to minister encouragement in the midst of labours unnoticed by human eye, and unrewarded by human testimony? Even the most splendid enterprises of benevolence, which the world ever witnessed, can be traced to the operation of what the world laughs at, as a quakerish and methodistical piety. And we appeal to the abolition of the slave trade, and the still nobler abolition of vice and ignorance, which is now accomplishing amongst the uncivilised countries of the earth, for the proof, that in good will to men, as well as glory to God, they are the men of piety who bear away the palm of superiority and of triumph.

But, secondly, If all Scripture and all observation

are on the side of our text, should not this be turned by each of us into a personal concern? Should it not be taken up, and pursued, as a topic in which we all have a deep individual interest? Should it not have a more permanent hold of us, than a mere amusing general speculation? Are not prudence, and anticipation, and a sense of danger, all linked with the conclusion we have attempted to press upon you? In one word, if there be such a thing as a moral government on the part of God, — if there be such a thing as the authority of a high and divine legislature, — if there be such a thing as a throne in heaven, and a judge sitting on that throne, — should not the question, What shall I do to be saved? come with all its big and deeply felt significancy into the heart and conscience of every one of us? We know that there is a very loose and general security upon this subject, — that the question, if it ever be suggested at all, is disposed of in an easy, indolent, and superficial way, by some such presumption, as that God is merciful, and that should be enough to pacify us. But why recur to any presumption, for the purpose of bringing the question to a settlement, when, upon this very topic, we are favoured with an authoritative message from God? — when an actual embassy has come from him, and that on the express errand of reconciliation? — when the records of this embassy have been collected into a volume, within the reach of all who will stretch forth their hand to it? — when the obvious expedient of consulting this record is before us? And surely, if what God says

of himself is of higher signification than what we think him to be, and if he tell us not merely that he is merciful, but that there is a particular way in which he chooses to be so, — nothing remains for us but submissively to learn that way, and obediently to go along with it. But he actually tells us, that there is no other name given under heaven, whereby man can be saved, but the name of Jesus. He tells us, that it is only in Christ that he has reconciled the world unto himself. He tells us, that our alone redemption is in him whom God has set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, — that he might be just, while the justifier of him who believeth in Jesus ; — and surely, we must either give up the certainty of the record, or count these to be faithful sayings, and worthy of all acceptance.

Lastly, The question may occur, after having established the fact of human corruption, and recommended a simple acquiescence in the Saviour for forgiveness, What becomes of the corruption after this? Must we just be doing with it as an obstinate peculiarity of our nature, bearing down all our powers of resistance, and making every struggle with it hopeless and unavailing? For the answer to this question, we commit you, as before, to the record. He who is in Christ Jesus is a new creature. Sin has no longer dominion over him. That very want which constituted the main violence of the disease, is made up to him. He wanted the love of God ; and this love is shed abroad in his

heart by the Holy Ghost. He wanted the love of his neighbour ; but God enters into a covenant with him, by which he puts this law in his heart, and writes it in his mind. The Spirit is given to them who ask it in faith, and the habitual prayer of, Support me in the performance of this duty,—or, Carry me in safety through this trial of my heart and of my principles,—is heard with acceptance, and answered with power. The power of Christ is made to rest on those who look to him ; and they will find to be their experience what Paul found to be his,—they will be able to do all things through Christ strengthening them. Now, the question we have to put is,—Tell us, if all this sound strange, and mysterious, and foreign, to the general style of your conceptions ? Then be alarmed for your safety. The things you thus profess to be strange to you are not the peculiar notions of one man, or the still more peculiar phraseology of another. They are the very notions and the very phraseology of the Bible,—and you, by your antipathy or disregard to them, bring yourselves under precisely the same reckoning with God, that you do with a distant acquaintance, whom you insult by returning his letter unopened, or despise, by suffering it to lie beside you unread and unattended to. In this indelible word of God, you will meet with the free offer of forgiveness for the past, and a provision laid before you, by which all who make use of it are carried forward to amendment, and progressive virtue, for the future. They are open to all, and at the taking of all ; but in pro-

portion to the frankness, and freeness, and universality, of the offer, will be the severity of that awful threatening to them who despise it. How shall they escape, if they neglect so great a salvation?

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Consult Vol. II. p. 41. of the Sunday Library.

ON WINTER, AS THE SEASON OF SOCIAL AMUSEMENT.

PSALM lxxxiv. 5, 6.

Blessed are the men, who going through the vale of misery, use it for a well; and the pools are filled with water.

THE words of the text contain, in their moral view, one of the most beautiful allusions which is to be found even in the sacred poetry of the Psalmist. They allude to that similitude, so natural to an eastern imagination, of the course of human life to a journey through the sandy desert;—and they represent the scenes of joy and amusement with which life is interspersed, “as the green vales of the desert, in which water springs,” and where the weary traveller may find a temporary repose. But they represent still more beautifully, in their moral view, what is the duty of that traveller;—not to linger around these fountains of ease and joy, but to use them only as for a well, to revive his exhausted strength, — to invigorate his purposed resolutions, — and to send him forward, “renewed in his mind,” on his great journey to the promised land.

I am led, my brethren, to this application of the beautiful allusion in the text, by the circumstances

of the time in which we meet. While the annual season of education and business has begun, there has, at the same time, still more lately, begun among us the annual season of pleasure and amusement. The young, the gay, and the opulent, are now preparing to enliven the winter of our year with artificial joys, and are looking forward to days of social mirth and innocent festivity. It is a moment which a benevolent mind cannot look to without a kind of melancholy interest. Even in the midst of his sympathy with the mirth of the innocent and the young, his heart will be sad with the memory of former days, — when he remembers those now lost to fame, to honour, and to happiness, who once entered life with hearts as gay, and minds as innocent, — and when he thinks, that, in the bright circle of those he sees, there will, too surely, be some whom this season of gaiety will lead to error and to folly, and who will live one day to curse their fatal entrance upon that scene which now they think prodigal only of joy and happiness. It is under this impression that I now wish to submit to the young of our congregation some very simple observations; and, ere they advance upon the road even of innocent amusement, to lay before them some of the dangers which await the inordinate love of it.

1. It were unjust and ungrateful to conceive that the amusements of life are altogether forbidden by its beneficent Author. They serve, on the contrary, important purposes in the economy of human life, and are destined to produce important effects both

upon our happiness and character. They are, in the first place, in the language of the Psalmist, “the wells of the desert;” the kind resting-places in which toil may relax, in which the weary spirit may recover its tone, and where the desponding mind may re-assume its strength and its hopes. They are, in another view, of some importance to the dignity of individual character. In every thing we call amusement, there is generally some display of taste and of imagination, — some elevation of the mind from mere animal indulgence, or the baseness of sensual desire. Even in the scenes of relaxation, therefore, they have a tendency to preserve the dignity of human character, and to fill up the vacant and unguarded hours of life with occupations innocent at least, if not virtuous. But their principal effect, perhaps, is upon the social character of man. Whenever amusement is sought, it is in the society of our brethren; and whenever it is found, it is in our sympathy with the happiness of those around us. It bespeaks the disposition of benevolence, and it creates it. When men assemble, accordingly, for the purpose of general happiness or joy, they exhibit to the thoughtful eye one of the most pleasing appearances of their original character. They leave behind them, for a time, the faults of their station and the asperities of their temper; — they forget the secret views and the selfish purposes of their ordinary life, and mingle with the crowd around them with no other view than to receive and to communicate happiness. It is a spectacle which it is im-

possible to observe without emotion ; and, while the virtuous man rejoices at that evidence which it affords of the benevolent constitution of his nature, the pious man is apt to bless the benevolence of that God, who thus makes the wilderness and the solitary place be glad, and whose wisdom renders even the hours of amusement subservient to the cause of virtue.

2. It is not, therefore, my brethren, the use of the innocent amusements of life which is dangerous, but the abuse of them ; — it is not when they are occasionally, but when they are constantly pursued, — when the love of amusement degenerates into a passion, and when, from being an occasional indulgence, it becomes a habitual desire. What the consequences of this inordinate love of amusement are, I shall now endeavour very briefly to show you.

When we look, in a moral view, to the consequences of human pursuits, we are not to stop at the precise and immediate effects which they may seem to have upon character. It is chiefly by the general frame of mind they produce, and the habitual dispositions they create, that we are to determine whether their influence is fortunate or unfortunate on those who are engaged in them. In every pursuit, whatever gives strength and energy to the mind of man, experience teaches to be favourable to the interests of piety, of knowledge, and of virtue ; — in every pursuit, on the contrary, whatever enfeebles or limits the powers of mind, the same experience everywhere shows to be hostile to the best interests of human nature.

If we consider, in this view, the effects of the habitual love even of the most innocent amusement, we shall find that it produces necessarily, for the hour in which it is indulged, an enfeebled and dependent frame of mind ;—that in such scenes energy and resolution fade ;—that in the enjoyment of the present hour, the past and the future are alike forgotten, and that the heart learns to be satisfied with passive emotion, and momentary pleasure.

It is to this single observation, my young friends, that I wish at present to direct your attention ; and to entreat you to consider what may be expected to be the effects of such a character of mind, at your age, upon the honour and happiness of future life.

1. It tends to degrade all the powers of the understanding. It is the eternal law of nature, that truth and wisdom are the offspring of labour, of vigour, and perseverance in every worthy object of pursuit. The eminent stations of fame, accordingly, and the distinguished honours of knowledge have, in every age, been the reward only of such early attainments, of that cherished elevation of mind which pursues only magnificent ends, and of that heroic fortitude which, whether in action or in speculation, pursues them by the means of un-deviating exertion. For the production of such a character, no discipline can be so unfit as that of the habitual love of amusement. It kindles not the eye of ambition ;—it bids the heart beat with no throb of generous admiration ;—it lets the soul be calm,

while all the rest of our fellows are passing us in the road of virtue or of science. Satisfied with humble and momentary enjoyment, it aspires to no honour, no praise, no pre-eminence; and, contented with the idle gratification of the present hour, forgets alike what man has done, and what man was born to do.

If such be the character of the youthful mind, if it be with such aims and such ambition that its natural elevation can be satisfied, am I to ask you, my brethren, what must be the appearances of riper years? — what the effect of such habits of thought upon the understanding of manhood? Alas! a greater instructor, the mighty instructor, Experience, may show you in every rank of life what these effects are. It will show you men born with every capacity, and whose first years glowed with every honourable ambition, whom no vice even now degrades, and to whom no actual guilt is affixed, who yet live in the eye of the world only as the objects of pity or of scorn, — who, in the idle career of habitual amusement, have dissipated all their powers, and lost all their ambition, — and who exist now for no purpose but to be the sad memorials of ignoble taste and degraded understanding.

2. The inordinate love of pleasure is, in the second place, equally hostile to the moral character. If the feeble and passive disposition of mind which it produces be unfavourable to the exertions of the understanding, it is, in the same measure, as unfavourable to the best employments of the heart. The great duties of life, the duties for which every

man and woman is born, demand, in all situations, the mind of labour and perseverance. From the first hour of existence to the last, — from the cradle of the infant, beside which the mother watches with unslumbering eye, to the grave of the aged, where the son pours his last tears upon the bier of his father, — in all that intermediate time, every day calls for exertion and activity; and the moral honours of our being can only be won by the steadfast magnanimity of pious duty. If such be the laborious but animating destiny of man, is it, my brethren, in the enervating school of habitual amusement, that the young are to fit themselves for its high discharge? Is it from hence that the legislator is to learn those lengthened toils which decide the happiness of nations; or the warrior that undaunted spirit, which can scorn both danger and death in the defence of his country? Or is it here, my young friends, that experience tells you, you can best learn to perform the common duties of your coming days, — those sacred duties of domestic life which every one is called to discharge, from which neither riches nor poverty are free, and which, far more than all others, open to you the solemn prospect of either being the blessings or the curses of society? Alas! experience has here also decided; it tells you, that the mind which exists only for pleasure, cannot exist for duty; — it tells you, that the feeble and selfish spirit of amusement gradually corrodes all the benevolent emotions of the heart, and withers the most sacred ties of domestic affec-

tion ;—and it points its awful finger to the examples of those, alas ! of both sexes, whom the unrestrained love of idle pleasure first led to error and folly, and whom, with sure but fatal progress, it has since conducted to be the objects of secret shame, and public infamy.

3. In the last place, this unmanly disposition is equally fatal to happiness, as to virtue. It is this which is so beautifully expressed in the concluding words of the text. “Blessed are they, who, going through the vale of misery, use it for a well ; and the pools are filled with water.” It means obviously, that to the wise and virtuous, — to those who use the pleasures of life only as a temporary relaxation, as a resting-place to animate them on the great journey on which they are travelling, the hours of amusement bring real pleasure ; that to them the well of joy is ever full, while to those who linger by its side, its waters are soon dried and exhausted. It is an observation, the truth of which every one must perceive and feel. I speak not now of those bitter waters which must mingle themselves with the well of unhallowed pleasure, — of the secret reproaches of accusing conscience, — of the sad sense of shame and dishonour, — and of that degraded spirit, which must bend itself beneath the scorn of the world, — I speak only of the simple and natural effect of unwise indulgence ; — that it renders the mind callous to enjoyment ; — and that, even though the “fountain were full of water,” the feverish lip is incapable of satiating its thirst. Alas !

here too, my brethren, we may see the examples of human folly ; — we may see around us everywhere the fatal effects of unrestrained pleasure , — the young sickening in the midst of every pure and genuine enjoyment, — the mature hastening, with hopeless step, to fill up the hours of a vitiated being, — and, what is still more wretched, the hoary head wandering in the way of folly, and, with an unhallowed dotage, returning again to the trifles and the amusements of childhood.

Such then, my young friends, are the natural and experienced consequences of the inordinate love even of innocent amusement, and such the intellectual and moral degradation to which the paths of pleasure conduct. On that path you are now entering ; — the season opens to you many various sources of enjoyment, — and many a syren voice is prepared to invite you to indulgence and joy. At such a time, let me entreat you to pause, ere you begin your course ; ere those habits are acquired which may never again be subdued ; and ere ye permit the charms of pleasure to wind around your soul their fascinating powers.

Think, with the elevation and generosity of your age, whether this is the course that leads to honour or to fame ; — whether it was in this discipline that they were exercised, who, in every age, have blessed or have enlightened the world, — whose shades are present to your midnight thoughts, — and whose names you cannot pronounce without the tear of gratitude or admiration.

Think, still more, whether it was to the ends of unmanly pleasure that you were dedicated, when the solemn service of religion first enrolled you in the number of the faithful, and when the ardent tears of your parents mingled with the waters of your baptism. If they live, is it in such paths that their anxious eyes delight to see you tread? — If they are no more, is it on such scenes that they can bend their venerated heads from heaven, and rejoice in the course of their children?

But, far more than all, think, my young friends, on your entrance upon time's eventful journey, — whether it was to pursue the course of an idle, a selfish, and an inglorious life, that you were created “in the image of God,” — and that the inspiration of the Almighty himself gave you understanding? — whether this was the course which the Saviour of the world pursued, and on which he hath called you “to follow him?” — and whether this is the character of those “spirits made perfect,” who, after having finished the journey upon which you are now entering, “stand before the throne of that God for ever?”

ON WINTER, AS THE SEASON OF RELIGIOUS THOUGHT.

PSALM lxxiv. 17.

Thou hast made summer and winter.

UPON a former occasion, I addressed myself to the young of our congregation, in reference to that season of amusement which winter generally brings; and I endeavoured to explain to them some of those dangers to which the unrestrained love even of innocent amusement naturally leads, and what are the melancholy effects which it too frequently has, both upon their future conduct and happiness.

There are many others, however, to whom winter arrives, beside the young and the gay; — there are other sentiments than those of joy, with which the hearts of many meet its approach; and there are higher instructions which it is fitted to give, than those which youth alone can derive from it. It is to this description of our congregation, — to the serious, the thoughtful, and the mature, — that I now wish, for a few moments, to address myself; to show them what are the lessons which they may draw from the appearances they witness, and to suggest to them

some of those reflections which the season naturally awakens, and which it would be wise in us all to render familiar to our minds.

I have before had occasion to observe, that, while the great end of the variation of seasons is the support and maintenance of the material world to which we belong, it has yet also an indirect effect in the moral and religious instruction of man; and that, by this silent means, “day unto day uttereth unto him speech, and night unto night teacheth him knowledge.” There are emotions which every where characterise the different seasons of the year. In its progress, the savage is led, as well as the sage, to see the varying attributes of the Divine Mind; —and, in its magnificent circle, it is fitted to awaken, in succession, the loftiest sentiments of piety which the heart can feel. When spring appears, — when the earth is covered with its tender green, and the song of happiness is heard in every shade, it is a call to us to religious hope and joy. Over the infant year the breath of heaven seems to blow with paternal softness, and the heart of man willingly participates in the joyfulness of awakened nature. When summer reigns, and every element is filled with life, and the sun like a giant pursues his course through the firmament above, it is the season of solemn adoration, — we see then, as it were, the majesty of the present God; —and wherever we direct our eye, “the glory of the Lord seems to cover the earth, as the waters cover the sea.” When autumn comes, and the annual miracle of

nature is completed, — “when all things that exist have waited upon the God which made them, and he hath given them food in due season,” it is the appropriate season of thankfulness and praise. The heart bends with instinctive gratitude before Him whose beneficence neither “slumbers nor sleeps,” and who, from the throne of glory, “yet remembereth the things that are in heaven and earth.”

The season of winter has also similar instructions ; — to the thoughtful and the feeling mind it comes not without a blessing upon its wings ; — and perhaps the noblest lessons of religion are to be learnt amid its clouds and storms.

1. It is, in the first place, a season of solemnity, and the aspect of every thing around us is fitted to call the mind to deep and serious thought. The gay variety of nature is no more ; — the sounds of joy have ceased, and the flowers which opened to the ray of summer are all now returned to dust. The sun himself seems to withdraw his light, or to become enfeebled in his power ; and while night usurps her dark and silent reign, the host of heaven burst with new radiance upon our view, and pursue through unfathomable space their bright career. It is the season when we best learn the greatness of Him that made us. The appearances of other seasons confine our regards chiefly to the world we inhabit. It is in the darkness of winter that we raise our eyes to “those heavens which declare his power, and to that firmament which showeth his handy-work.” The mind expands while it loses itself amid

the infinity of being ; and from the gloom of this lower world, imagination anticipates the splendours of “ those new heavens and that new earth,” which are to be the final seats of the children of God.

But there is still a greater reflection which the season is destined to inspire. While we contemplate the decaying sun, — while we weep over the bier of nature, and hear the winds of winter desolating the earth, — what is it that this annual revolution teaches even to the infant mind? Is it that the powers of nature have failed, that the world waxeth old, and that the night of existence is approaching? No ! It is, that this reign of gloom and desolation will pass ; — it is, that spring will again return, and that nature will re-assume its robe of beauty. In the multitude of years that have gone before us, this mighty resurrection has annually been accomplished. To our fathers, and the old time before them, the yearly beneficence of heaven has been renewed ; and, while the night of winter has sunk in heaviness, joy hath as uniformly attended the morning of the spring.

There is no language which can speak more intelligibly to the thoughtful mind than this language of nature ; and it is repeated to us, every year, to teach us trust and confidence in God. It tells us, that the power which first created existence is weakened by no time, and subject to no decay ; — it tells us, that, in the majesty of His reign, “ a thousand years are but as one day,” while, in the beneficence of it, “ one day is as a thousand years ;” — it tells us, still fur-

ther, that in the magnificent system of his government there exists no evil ; that the appearances, which to our limited and temporary view seem pregnant with destruction, are, in the boundless extent of his Providence, the sources of returning good ; and that, in the very hours when we might conceive nature to be deserted and forlorn, the spirit of the Almighty is operating with unceasing force, and preparing in silence the renovation of the world.

Such, my brethren, are the first instructions which this season is fitted to bring.—Amid the solemn thoughts which it awakens, it leads us to the contemplation of that boundless Wisdom which governs the revolutions of nature ;—amid the apparent decay of being, it reminds us of that Almighty Power by which all is renewed ; and, by the very contrasts which it presents, it tells us of the unceasing goodness of him “whom both summer and winter obey.”

2. There is another view of the subject.

The seasons of the year, while they all testify, though with various voice, the attributes of the Almighty, have also analogies to the condition of man ; and every language is full of those similitudes which arise from the progress of the year, and the progress of human life. Let me at present suggest to you some of the most obvious of those reflections which the present season inspires, and some of the consolations which the appearances of winter dictate to those whose condition may resemble it.

Its first and most obvious analogy is to that of old age,—to the darkened eye, and the decaying frame,

and the hoary head upon which the snows of time have fallen. You have arrived, my brethren, like the year, at the winter of your days ; but, as in the annual revolutions of time, he that formed you has not decayed. The same Power which first called you into being, and spread the blossoms of your spring, is now, in his great system, conducting you to the termination of your days, and resolving your material frame into the dust from which it sprung. It is indeed a season of solemnity, but let it not be to you a season of gloom ;—it is the same goodness which first led you into life, which is now withdrawing you from it ;—it is the same unwearied care which presided over the hour of your birth that will finally preside over the hour of your dissolution. Amid the desolations of winter, the voice of Nature tells you, that spring will return, and the earth will be again covered with the glory of the Lord :—amid the weakness and weariness of age, the voice of Revelation tells you, that another spring shall visit the grave ; “ that the dead shall rise, and they shall be changed ; ” and that, in the great destiny of the virtuous soul, the frailty of man shall put on “ incorruption,” and the infirmities of age shall put on “ immortality.”

The second great relation which the season of winter has to the condition of man, is to that of those who mourn,—those who, in this imperfect and unfinished state of being, are suffering under the apparent influences of chance and time. How many are there, in every congregation, to whom

this similitude may apply ! — they who labour under the pressure of unmerited disease, — or struggle with the hardships of hopeless poverty, — or weep over the many unforeseen miseries of domestic life ; — they who have once known better days, and are now consigned, by the cruelty of the world, to obscurity and neglect ; — and they, far more, who bend over the ashes of those whom they loved, and, bereaved of all they held dear, refuse the voice of comfort. To such mourners, to those who in the state of trial are innocently suffering, the great language of consolation is doubtless that of the Gospel. It is such tears which faith alone can dry ; — and it is upon such secret chambers of resigned distress, that “ the Spirit of God descends with healing upon his wings.” Yet let me also remind you, my brethren, that Nature too has its voice of consolation ; — and that the same God who made summer the emblem of the duties of prosperity, has made winter also the emblem of the graces of adversity. You have arrived, then, at the moral winter of your being, — the night of sorrow is closing over your heads, — and the sun, which brightened your former days, seems to be withdrawing from your view. It is the kindred spectacle which Nature now presents to your eyes. Yet the sun, you know, will again return unto his place in the heavens ; — the clouds that shroud the face of the earth will disappear, and the voice of joy will be heard amid the promises of another season. Think not, my brethren, that the Providence which thus watcheth over material nature

is regardless of the moral happiness of man ; — think rather, that he thus opens to you the laws of his government, and that he makes the year of nature the emblem of your immortal year ; — think, far more, that, in his moral system, there is no evil to the virtuous ; and that it is not the momentary state, but the final issue, which is to disclose his eternal design. While, therefore, you see the storms of winter preparing the earth for the blossoms of another spring, let them be the sign to you of those kind severities by which he prepares your souls for greater joys, — by which he purifies your desires, and strengthens your faith, and weans you from the love of a temporary being ; — and while, during the long night, ye behold the splendours of the distant heavens, let them point out to your prophetic eye that region of final bliss, “ those green pastures, and those still waters,” where, after the wilderness of life is past, there is “ rest for the children of God.”

I would to God, my brethren, that all of us, whether young or old, whether sorrowful or happy, could raise our minds to these high meditations ; and that, while we listened, in the hours of solitude, to the instructions of Revelation, we would listen also, in our common hours, to the kindred instructions of Nature. It is such habits of thought that best incorporate religion with our souls ; — that make us see the Deity in every scene we visit, and every appearance we behold ; — and convert the world, in which the ignorant and the thoughtless

perceive only the reign of chance and time, into the temple of the living and the present God.

Of the innumerable eyes that open upon nature, none but those of man see its Author and its end. There is something very solemn in this mighty privilege. It is the privilege of a being not made to perish with time, and formed, in some greater hour, to know him who inhabiteth eternity. It is the privilege, still more, of that being, whom, amid the clouds and darkness of this lower world, the Son of God came in mercy to seek and to save.

Let, then, my brethren, the storms of winter blow, and the rains of heaven descend. While every inferior nature shrinks from their approach, let us meet them as the signs of the same Goodness which brings forth the promises of spring, and fulfils the hopes of the harvest ; — let us see them, as the evidence of that Wisdom which makes momentary evil the source of final good, and which can make the tears which mortality sheds, in a greater state, to be reaped in joy. Whatever may be the natural or moral appearances which we behold, let us never forget that the same Almighty Mind reigns amid them all ; — that to the wise and the virtuous “ all things are working together for good ; ” and that, amid the winter of our moral nature, that mind is formed, and those dispositions are nursed, which are to re-awaken under the influence of a greater spring, and to exist when the revolutions of nature are past, and when time itself shall be no more.

ROBERT HALL, A.M.

LATE, SUCCESSIVELY, MINISTER OF THE BAPTIST CHURCH
AT CAMBRIDGE, AT LEICESTER, AND AT BRISTOL : BORN
1764; DIED 1831.

Although this truly eminent, pious, and eloquent divine was not, strictly speaking, of the Church of England, there can be no doubt of the Christian purity of his doctrines, and of the liberal and enlightened views which he displayed upon all topics that called forth his most earnest exhortations. The chapels, at either place, of which he was successively the minister, were usually crowded with a congregation, which hung in breathless admiration over the accents of piety and spirit-stirring eloquence which flowed from his tongue. Of *all* his sermons, perhaps *that*, now reprinted for the thousandth time, is the most justly to be commended. The subject treated of is awfully critical; and the mode of its treatment is such as can never be surpassed. At no period of society, — and therefore in no collection of hortatory Divinity, — will a serious attention to its manifold beauties fail to excite emotions of equal gratification and thankfulness.

MODERN INFIDELITY CONSIDERED, &c.

EPHESIANS, ii. 12.

Without God in the world.

As the Christian ministry is established for the instruction of men, throughout every age, in truth and holiness, it must adapt itself to the ever-shifting scenes of the moral world, and stand ready to repel the attacks of impiety and error, under whatever form they may appear. The church and the world form two societies so distinct, and are governed by such opposite principles and maxims, that, as well from this contrariety, as from the express warnings of Scripture, true Christians must look for a state of warfare,—with this consoling assurance, that the church, like the burning bush beheld by Moses in the land of Midian, may be encompassed with flames, but will never be consumed.

When she was delivered from the persecuting power of Rome, she only experienced a change of trials. The oppression of external violence was followed by the more dangerous and insidious attacks of internal enemies. The freedom of enquiry claimed and asserted at the Reformation, degenerated, in the hands of men who professed the principles without

possessing the spirit of the reformers, into a fondness for speculative refinements, and consequently into a source of dispute, faction, and heresy. While Protestants attended more to the points on which they differed, than to those in which they agreed; while more zeal was employed in settling ceremonies and defending subtleties, than in enforcing plain revealed truths, the lovely fruits of peace and charity perished under the storms of controversy.

In this disjointed and disordered state of the Christian church, they who never looked into the interior of Christianity were apt to suspect, that to a subject so fruitful in particular disputes must attach a general uncertainty, and that a religion founded on revelation could never have occasioned such discordancy of principle and practice amongst its disciples. Thus infidelity is the joint offspring of an irreligious temper and unholy speculation, employed not in examining the evidences of Christianity, but in detecting the vices and imperfections of professing Christians. It has passed through various stages, each distinguished by higher gradations of impiety; for when men arrogantly abandon their guide, and wilfully shut their eyes on the light of heaven, it is wisely ordained that their errors shall multiply at every step, until their extravagance confutes itself, and the mischief of their principles works its own antidote. That such has been the progress of infidelity, will be obvious from a slight survey of its history.

LORD HERBERT, the first and purest of our

English *free-thinkers*, who flourished in the beginning of the reign of Charles the First, did not so much impugn the doctrine or the morality of the Scriptures, as attempt to supersede their necessity, by endeavouring to show that the great principles of the unity of God, a moral government, and a future world, are taught with sufficient clearness by the light of nature. BOLINGBROKE, and others of his successors, advanced much farther, and attempted to invalidate the proofs of the moral character of the Deity, and consequently all expectations of rewards and punishments; leaving the Supreme Being no other perfections than those which belong to a first cause, or almighty contriver. After him, at a considerable distance, followed HUME, the most subtle, if not the most philosophical, of the Deists; who, by denying the relations of cause and effect, boldly aimed to introduce an universal scepticism, and to pour a more than Egyptian darkness into the whole region of morals. Since his time, sceptical writers have sprung up in abundance, and infidelity has allured multitudes to its standard, — the young and superficial by its dexterous sophistry, the vain by the literary fame of its champions, and the profligate by the licentiousness of its principles. Atheism the most undisguised has at length begun to make its appearance.

Animated by numbers, and emboldened by success, the infidels of the present day have given a new direction to their efforts, and impress a new character on the ever-growing mass of their impious speculations.

By uniting more closely with each other, by giving a sprinkling of irreligion to all their literary productions, they aim to engross the formation of the public mind; and, amidst the warmest professions of attachment to virtue, to effect an entire disruption of morality from religion. Pretending to be the teachers of virtue, and the guides of life, they propose to revolutionise the morals of mankind; to regenerate the world, by a process entirely new; and to rear the temple of virtue, not merely without the aid of religion, but on the renunciation of its principles, and the derision of its sanctions. Their party has derived a great accession of numbers and strength from events the most momentous and astonishing in the political world, which have divided the sentiments of Europe betwixt hope and terror; and, however they may issue, have, for the present, swelled the ranks of infidelity. So rapidly, indeed, has it advanced since this crisis, that a great majority on the Continent, and in England a considerable proportion of those who pursue literature as a profession*, may justly be considered as the open or disguised abettors of atheism.

With respect to the sceptical and religious systems, the enquiry at present is not so much which is the truest in speculation, as which is the most useful in practice; or, in other words, whether morality will be best promoted by considering it as a part of a great and comprehensive law, emanating from the will of a

* By those who pursue literature as a profession, the author would be understood to mean that numerous class of literary men who draw their principal subsistence from their writings.

supreme, omnipotent legislator; or as a mere expedient, adapted to our present situation, enforced by no other motives than those which arise from the prospects and interests of the present state. The absurdity of atheism having been demonstrated so often and so clearly, by many eminent men, that this part of the subject is exhausted, I should hasten immediately to what I have more particularly in view, were I not apprehensive a discourse of this kind may be expected to contain some statement of the argument in proof of a Deity; which, therefore, I shall present in as few and plain words as possible.

When we examine a watch, or any other piece of machinery, we instantly perceive marks of design. The arrangement of its several parts, and the adaptation of its movements to one result, show it to be a contrivance; nor do we ever imagine the faculty of contriving to be in the watch itself, but in a separate agent. If we turn from art to nature, we behold a vast magazine of contrivances; we see innumerable objects replete with the most exquisite design. The human eye, for example, is formed with admirable skill for the purpose of sight, the ear for the function of hearing. As in the productions of art we never think of ascribing the power of contrivance to the machine itself, so we are certain the skill displayed in the human structure is not a property of man, since he is very imperfectly acquainted with his own formation. If there be an inseparable relation betwixt the ideas of a contrivance and a

contriver ; and it be evident, in regard to the human structure, the designing agent is not man himself, there must undeniably be some separate, invisible being, who is his former. This great Being we mean to indicate by the appellation of Deity.

This reasoning admits but of one reply. Why, it will be said, may we not suppose the world has always continued as it is ; that is, that there has been a constant succession of finite beings, appearing and disappearing on the earth, from all eternity ? I answer, whatever is supposed to have occasioned this constant succession, exclusive of an intelligent cause, will never account for the undeniable marks of design visible in all finite beings. Nor is the absurdity of supposing a contrivance without a contriver diminished by this imaginary succession, but rather increased, by being repeated at every step of the series.

Besides, an eternal succession of finite beings involves in it a contradiction, and is therefore plainly impossible. As the supposition is made to get quit of the idea of any one having existed from eternity, each of the beings in the succession must have begun in time ; but the succession itself is eternal. We have then the succession of beings infinitely earlier than any being in the succession ; or, in other words, a series of beings running on *ad infinitum* before it reached any particular being, which is absurd.

From these considerations, it is manifest there must be some eternal being, or nothing could ever

have existed : and since the beings which we behold bear in their whole structure evident marks of wisdom and design, it is equally certain that he who formed them is a wise and intelligent agent.

To prove the unity of this great Being, in opposition to a plurality of gods, it is not necessary to have recourse to metaphysical abstractions. It is sufficient to observe, that the notion of more than one Author of Nature is inconsistent with that harmony of design which pervades her works ; that it explains no appearances, is supported by no evidence, and serves no purpose but to embarrass and perplex our conceptions.

Such are the proofs of the existence of that great and glorious Being whom we denominate God ; and it is not presumption to say, it is impossible to find another truth in the whole compass of morals, which, according to the justest laws of reasoning, admits of such strict and rigorous demonstration.

But I proceed to the more immediate object of this discourse, which, as has been already intimated, is not so much to evince the falsehood of scepticism as a theory, as to display its mischievous effects, contrasted with those which result from the belief of a Deity and a future state. The subject viewed in this light may be considered under two aspects : the influence of the opposite systems on the principles of morals, and on the formation of character. The first may be styled their direct, the latter their equally important but indirect, consequence and tendency.

I. The sceptical, or irreligious system, subverts the whole foundation of morals. — It may be assumed as a maxim, that no person can be required to act contrary to his greatest good, or his highest interest, comprehensively viewed in relation to the whole duration of his being. It is often our duty to forego our own interest *partially*, to sacrifice a smaller pleasure for the sake of a greater, to incur a present evil in pursuit of a distant good of more consequence; in a word, to arbitrate amongst interfering claims of inclination is the moral arithmetic of human life. But to risk the happiness of the whole duration of our being in any case whatever, were it possible, would be foolish; because the sacrifice must, by the nature of it, be so great as to preclude the possibility of compensation.

As the present world, on sceptical principles, is the only place of recompence, whenever the practice of virtue fails to promise the greatest sum of present good, — cases which often occur in reality, and much oftener in appearance, — every motive to virtuous conduct is superseded; a deviation from rectitude becomes the part of wisdom; and should the path of virtue, in addition to this, be obstructed by disgrace, torment, or death, to persevere would be madness and folly, and a violation of the first and most essential law of nature. Virtue, on these principles, being in numberless instances at war with self-preservation, never can, or ought to become a fixed habit of the mind.

The system of infidelity is not only incapable of

arming virtue for great and trying occasions, but leaves it unsupported in the most ordinary occurrences. In vain will its advocates appeal to a moral sense, to benevolence and sympathy ; for it is undeniable that these impulses may be overcome. In vain will they expatiate on the tranquillity and pleasure attendant on a virtuous course ; for though you may remind the offender that in disregarding them he has violated his nature, and that a conduct consistent with them is productive of much internal satisfaction ; yet if he reply that his taste is of a different sort, that there are other gratifications which he values more, and that every man must choose his own pleasures, the argument is at an end.

Rewards and punishments allotted by omnipotent power, afford a palpable and pressing motive, which can never be neglected without renouncing the character of a rational creature ; but tastes and relishes are not to be prescribed.

A motive in which the reason of man shall acquiesce, enforcing the practice of virtue at all times and seasons, enters into the very essence of moral obligation. Modern infidelity supplies no such motives ; it is, therefore, essentially and infallibly a system of enervation, turpitude, and vice.

This chasm in the construction of morals can only be supplied by the firm belief of a rewarding and avenging Deity, who binds duty and happiness, though they may seem distant, in an indissoluble chain ; without which, whatever usurps the name of virtue is not a principle, but a feeling, — not a de-

terminate rule, but a fluctuating expedient, varying with the tastes of individuals, and changing with the scenes of life.

Nor is this the only way in which infidelity subverts the foundation of morals. All reasoning on morals pre-supposes a distinction between inclinations and duties, affections and rules. The former prompt; the latter prescribe. The former supply motives to action; the latter regulate and control it. Hence it is evident, if virtue have any just claim to authority, it must be under the latter of these notions; that is, under the character of a law. It is under this notion, *in fact*, that its dominion has ever been acknowledged to be paramount and supreme.

But, without the intervention of a superior will, it is impossible there should be any moral laws, except in the lax metaphorical sense in which we speak of the laws of matter and motion. Men being essentially equal, morality, is on these principles, only a stipulation, or silent compact, into which every individual is supposed to enter, as far as suits his convenience, and for the breach of which he is accountable to nothing but his own mind. His own mind is his law, his tribunal, and his judge!

Two consequences, the most disastrous to society, will inevitably follow the general prevalence of this system; the frequent perpetration of great crimes, and the total absence of great virtues.

1. In those conjunctures, which tempt avarice, or inflame ambition, — when a crime flatters with the prospect of impunity, and the certainty of immense advantage, what is to restrain an atheist from its

commission? — To say that remorse will deter him, is absurd; for remorse, as distinguished from pity, is the sole offspring of religious belief, the extinction of which is the great purpose of the infidel philosophy.

The dread of punishment, or infamy, from his fellow creatures, will be an equally ineffectual barrier; because crimes are only committed under such circumstances as suggest the hope of concealment: not to say that crimes themselves will soon lose their infamy and their horror under the influence of that system, which destroys the sanctity of virtue, by converting it into a low calculation of worldly interest. Here the sense of an ever-present Ruler, and of an avenging Judge, is of the most awful and indispensable necessity; as it is that alone which impresses on all crimes the character of *folly*, shows that duty and interest in every instance coincide, and that the most prosperous career of vice, the most brilliant successes of criminality, are but an accumulation of “*wrath against the day of wrath.*”

As the frequent perpetration of great crimes is an inevitable consequence of the diffusion of sceptical principles; so, to understand this consequence in its full extent, we must look beyond their immediate effects, and consider the disruption of social ties, the destruction of confidence, the terror, suspicion, and hatred, which must prevail in that state of society in which barbarous deeds are familiar. The tranquillity which pervades a well-ordered community, and the mutual good offices which bind its members

together, is founded on an implied confidence in the indisposition to annoy,—in the justice, humanity, and moderation, — of those among whom we dwell. So that the worst consequence of crimes is, that they impair the stock of public charity and general tenderness. The dread and hatred of our species would infallibly be grafted on a conviction that we were exposed every moment to the surges of an enraged ferocity, and that nothing but the power of the magistrate stood between us and the daggers of assassins. In such a state, laws, deriving no support from public manners, are unequal to the task of curbing the fury of the passions ; which, from being concentrated into selfishness, fear, and revenge, acquire new force. Terror and suspicion beget cruelty, and inflict injuries by way of prevention. Pity is extinguished in the stronger impulse of self-preservation. The tender and generous affections are crushed ; and nothing is seen but the retaliation of wrongs, the fierce and unmitigated struggle for superiority. This is but a faint sketch of the incalculable calamities and horrors we must expect, should we be so unfortunate as ever to witness the triumph of modern infidelity.

2. This system is a soil as barren of great and sublime virtues as it is prolific in crimes.—By great and sublime virtues are meant those which are called into action on great and trying occasions, which demand the sacrifice of the dearest interests and prospects of human life, and sometimes of life itself,—the virtues, in a word, which, by their rarity

and splendour, draw admiration, and have rendered illustrious the character of patriots, martyrs, and confessors. It requires but little reflection to perceive, that whatever veils a future world, and contracts the limits of existence within the present life, must tend, in a proportionable degree, to diminish the grandeur and narrow the sphere of human agency.

As well might you expect exalted sentiments of justice from a professed gamester, as look for noble principles in the man whose hopes and fears are all suspended on the present moment, and who stakes the whole happiness of his being on the events of this vain and fleeting life. If he be ever impelled to the performance of great achievements in a good cause, it must be solely by the hope of fame; a motive which, besides that it makes virtue the servant of opinion, usually grows weaker at the approach of death; and which, however it may surmount the love of existence in the heat of battle, or in the moment of public observation, can seldom be expected to operate with much force on the retired duties of a private station.

In affirming that infidelity is unfavourable to the higher class of virtues, we are supported as well by facts as by reasoning. We should be sorry to load our adversaries with unmerited reproach: but to what history, to what record will they appeal, for the traits of moral greatness exhibited by their disciples? Where shall we look for the trophies of infidel magnanimity, or atheistical virtue? Not that we mean to accuse them of inactivity: they

have recently filled the world with the fame of their exploits,—exploits of a different kind indeed, but of imperishable memory, and disastrous lustre.

Though it is confessed, great and splendid actions are not the ordinary employment of life, but must, from their nature, be reserved for high and eminent occasions ; yet that system is essentially defective, which leaves no room for their production. They are important, both from their immediate advantage and their remoter influence. They often save, and always illustrate, the age and nation in which they appear. They raise the standard of morals ; they arrest the progress of degeneracy ; they diffuse a lustre over the path of life. Monuments of the greatness of the human soul, they present to the world the august image of virtue in her sublimest form, from which streams of light and glory issue to remote times and ages ; while their commemoration, by the pen of historians and poets, awakens in distant bosoms the sparks of kindred excellence.

Combine the frequent and familiar perpetration of atrocious deeds with the dearth of great and generous actions, and you have the exact picture of that condition of society which completes the degradation of the species,—the frightful contrast of dwarfish virtues and gigantic vices, where every thing good is mean and little, and every thing evil is rank and luxuriant : a dead and sickening uniformity prevails, broken only at intervals by volcanic eruptions of anarchy and crime.

II. Hitherto we have considered the influence of

scepticism on the principles of virtue, and have endeavoured to show that it despoils it of its dignity, and lays its authority in the dust. Its influence on the formation of character remains to be examined. — The actions of men are oftener determined by their character than their interest: their conduct takes its colour more from their acquired taste, inclinations, and habits, than from a deliberate regard to their greatest good. It is only on great occasions the mind awakes to take an extended survey of her whole course, and that she suffers the dictates of reason to impress a new bias upon her movements. The actions of each day are, for the most part, links which follow each other in the chain of custom. Hence the great effort of practical wisdom is to imbue the mind with right tastes, affections, and habits, the elements of character and masters of action.

1. The exclusion of a Supreme Being, and of a superintending providence, tends directly to the destruction of moral taste. — It robs the universe of all finished and consummate excellence, even in idea. The admiration of perfect wisdom and goodness for which we are formed, and which kindles such unspeakable rapture in the soul, finding in the regions of scepticism nothing to which it corresponds, droops and languishes. In a world which presents a fair spectacle of order and beauty, of a vast family nourished and supported by an almighty Parent; in a world which leads the devout mind, step by step, to the contemplation of the first fair and the first

good, the sceptic is encompassed with nothing but obscurity, meanness, and disorder.

When we reflect on the manner in which the idea of Deity is formed, we must be convinced that such an idea, intimately present to the mind, must have a most powerful effect in refining the moral taste. Composed of the richest elements, it embraces, in the character of a beneficent Parent and almighty Ruler, whatever is venerable in wisdom, whatever is awful in authority, whatever is touching in goodness.

Human excellence is blended with many imperfections, and seen under many limitations. It is beheld only in detached and separate portions, nor ever appears in any one character whole and entire. So that when, in imitation of the Stoics, we wish to form out of these fragments the notion of a perfectly wise and good man, we know it is a mere fiction of the mind, without any real being in whom it is embodied and realised. In the belief of a Deity, these conceptions are reduced to reality : the scattered rays of an ideal excellence are concentrated, and become real attributes of that Being with whom we stand in the nearest relation, who sits supreme at the head of the universe, is armed with infinite power, and pervades all nature with his presence.

The efficacy of these views, in producing and augmenting a virtuous taste, will indeed be proportioned to the vividness with which they are formed, and the frequency with which they recur ; yet some benefit will not fail to result from them, even in their lowest degree.

The idea of the Supreme Being has this peculiar property ; that as it admits of no substitute, so, from the moment it is formed, it is capable of continual growth and enlargement. God himself is immutable ; but our conception of his character is continually receiving fresh accessions, is continually growing more extended and refulgent, by having transferred to it new elements of beauty and goodness ; by attracting to itself, as a centre, whatever bears the impress of dignity, order, or happiness. It borrows splendour from all that is fair, subordinates to itself all that is great, and sits enthroned on the riches of the universe.

As the object of worship will always be, in a degree, the object of imitation, hence arises a fixed standard of moral excellence, by the contemplation of which the tendencies to corruption are counteracted, the contagion of bad example is checked, and human nature rises above its natural level.

When the knowledge of God was lost in the world, just ideas of virtue and moral obligation disappeared along with it. How is it to be otherwise accounted for, that in the polished nations, and in the enlightened times of pagan antiquity, the most unnatural lusts and detestable impurities were not only tolerated in private life *, but entered into religion, and

* It is worthy of observation, that the elegant and philosophic *Xenophon*, in delineating the model of a perfect prince, in the character of Cyrus, introduces a Mede who had formed an unnatural passion for his hero ; and relates the incident in a lively, festive humour, without being in the least conscious of any indelicacy attached to it. What must be the state of

formed a material part of public worship; while among the Jews, a people so much inferior in every other branch of knowledge, the same vices were regarded with horror?

The reason is this: the true character of God was unknown to the former, which by the light of divine revelation was displayed to the latter. The former cast their deities in the mould of their own imaginations, in consequence of which they partook of the vices and defects of their worshippers. To the latter, no scope was left for the wanderings of fancy, but a pure and perfect model was prescribed.

False and corrupt, however, as was the religion of the pagans (if it deserve the name); and defective, and often vicious, as was the character of their imaginary deities; it was still better for the world, for the void to be filled with these, than abandoned to a total scepticism: for if both systems are equally false, they are not equally pernicious. When the fictions of heathenism consecrated the memory of its legislators and heroes, it invested them, for the most part, with those qualities which were in the greatest repute. They were supposed to possess, in the highest degree, the virtues in which it was most honourable to excel; and to be the witnesses, approvers, and patrons of those perfections in others, by which their own character was chiefly distinguished. Men saw, or rather fancied they saw, in these supposed deities, the qualities they most admired, di-

manners in a country where a circumstance of this kind,—feigned, no doubt, by way of ornament,—finds a place in such a work? — *Cyri Instit.* lib. i.

lated to a larger size, moving in a higher sphere, and associated with the power, dignity, and happiness of superior natures. With such ideal models before them, and conceiving themselves continually acting under the eye of such spectators and judges, they felt a real elevation ; their eloquence became more empassioned, their patriotism inflamed, and their courage exalted.

Revelation, by displaying the true character of God, affords a pure and perfect standard of virtue ; heathenism, one in many respects defective and vicious ; the fashionable scepticism of the present day, which excludes the belief of all superior powers, affords no standard at all. Human nature knows nothing better or higher than itself. All above and around it being shrouded in darkness, and the prospect confined to the tame realities of life, virtue has no room upwards to expand ; nor are any excursions permitted into that unseen world, the true element of the great and good, by which it is fortified with motives equally calculated to satisfy the reason, to delight the fancy, and to impress the heart.

2. Modern infidelity not only tends to corrupt the moral taste ; it also promotes the growth of those vices which are the most hostile to social happiness. — Of all the vices incident to human nature, the most destructive to society are vanity, ferocity, and unbridled sensuality ; and these are precisely the vices which infidelity is calculated to cherish.

That the love, fear, and habitual contemplation of a Being infinitely exalted,—or, in other words, devo-

tion, — is adapted to promote a sober and moderate estimate of our own excellencies, is incontestable; nor is it less evident that the exclusion of such sentiments must be favourable to pride. The criminality of pride will, perhaps, be less readily admitted; for though there is no vice so opposite to the spirit of Christianity, yet there is none which, even in the Christian world, has, under various pretences, been treated with so much indulgence.

There is, it will be confessed, a delicate sensibility to character, a sober desire of reputation, a wish to possess the esteem of the wise and good, felt by the purest minds, which is at the farthest remove from arrogance or vanity. The humility of a noble mind scarcely dares to approve of itself, until it has secured the approbation of others. Very different is that restless desire of distinction, that passion for theatrical display, which inflames the heart and occupies the whole attention of vain men. This, of all the passions, is the most unsocial, avarice itself not excepted. The reason is plain. Property is a kind of good which may be more easily attained, and is capable of more minute subdivisions, than fame. In the pursuit of wealth, men are led by an attention to their own interest to promote the welfare of each other; their advantages are reciprocal; the benefits which each is anxious to acquire for himself he reaps in the greatest abundance from the union and conjunction of society. The pursuits of vanity are quite contrary. The portion of time and attention mankind are willing to spare from their avocations

and pleasures, to devote to the admiration of each other, is so small, that every successful adventurer is felt to have impaired the common stock. The success of one is the disappointment of multitudes. For though there be many rich, many virtuous, many wise men, fame must necessarily be the portion of but few. Hence every vain man, every man in whom vanity is the ruling passion, regarding his rival as his enemy, is strongly tempted to rejoice in his miscarriage, and repine at his success.

Besides, as the passions are seldom seen in a simple, unmixed state ; so vanity, when it succeeds, degenerates into arrogance ; when it is disappointed — and it is often disappointed — is exasperated into malignity, and corrupted into envy. In this stage the vain man commences a determined misanthropist. He detests that excellence which he cannot reach. He detests his species, and longs to be revenged for the unpardonable injustice he has sustained in their insensibility to his merits. He lives upon the calamities of the world ; the vices and miseries of men are his element and his food. Virtue, talents, and genius, are his natural enemies, which he persecutes with instinctive eagerness, and unrelenting hostility. There are who doubt the existence of such a disposition ; but it certainly issues out of the dregs of disappointed vanity, — a disease which taints and vitiates the whole character wherever it prevails. It forms the heart to such a profound indifference to the welfare of others, that whatever appearances he may assume, or however wide the circle of his

seeming virtues may extend, you will infallibly find the vain man is his own centre. Attentive only to himself, absorbed in the contemplation of his own perfections, instead of feeling tenderness for his fellow-creatures, as members of the same family, as beings with whom he is appointed to act, to suffer, and to sympathise ; he considers life as a stage on which he is performing a part, and mankind in no other light than spectators. Whether he smiles or frowns,—whether his path is adorned with the rays of beneficence, or his steps are dyed in blood,—an attention to self is the spring of every movement, and the motive to which every action is referred.

His apparent good qualities lose all their worth, by losing all that is simple, genuine, and natural : they are even pressed into the service of vanity, and become the means of enlarging its power. The truly good man is jealous over himself, lest the notoriety of his best actions, by blending itself with their motives, should diminish their value ; the vain man performs the same actions for the sake of that notoriety. The good man quietly discharges his duty, and shuns ostentation ; the vain man considers every good deed lost that is not publicly displayed. The one is intent upon realities, the other upon semblances : the one aims to *be* virtuous, the other to *appear* so.

Nor is a mind inflated with vanity more disqualified for right action than just speculation, or better disposed to the pursuit of truth than the practice of virtue. To such a mind the simplicity of truth is dis-

gusting. Careless of the improvement of mankind, and intent only upon astonishing with the appearance of novelty, the glare of paradox will be preferred to the light of truth ; opinions will be embraced, not because they are just, but because they are new : the more flagitious, the more subversive of morals, the more alarming to the wise and good, the more welcome to men who estimate their literary powers by the mischief they produce, and who consider the anxiety and terror they impress as the measure of their renown. Truth is simple and uniform, while error may be infinitely varied ; and as it is one thing to start paradoxes, and another to make discoveries, we need the less wonder at the prodigious increase of modern philosophers.

We have been so much accustomed to consider extravagant self-estimation merely as a *ridiculous* quality, that many will be surprised to find it treated as a vice pregnant with serious mischief to society. But, to form a judgment of its influence on the manners and happiness of a nation, it is necessary only to look at its effects in a family ; for bodies of men are only collections of individuals, and the greatest nation is nothing more than an aggregate of a number of families. Conceive of a domestic circle, in which each member is elated with a most extravagant opinion of himself, and a proportionable contempt of every other, is full of little contrivances to catch applause, and whenever he is not praised is sullen and disappointed. What a picture of disunion, disgust, and animosity, would such a family pre-

sent ! How utterly would domestic affection be extinguished, and all the purposes of domestic society be defeated ! The general prevalence of such dispositions must be accompanied by an equal proportion of general misery. The tendency of pride to produce strife and hatred is sufficiently apparent, from the pains men have been at to construct a system of politeness, which is nothing more than a sort of mimic humility, in which the sentiments of an offensive self-estimation are so far disguised and suppressed as to make them compatible with the spirit of society ; such a mode of behaviour as would naturally result from an attention to the apostolic injunction, “ Let nothing be done through strife or vain glory ; but, in lowliness of mind, let each esteem other better than themselves.” But if the semblance be of such importance, how much more useful the reality ! If the mere garb of humility be of such indispensable necessity, that without it society could not subsist, how much better still would the harmony of the world be preserved, were the condescension, deference, and respect, so studiously displayed, a true picture of the heart ?

The same restless and eager vanity which disturbs a family, when it is permitted in a great national crisis to mingle with political affairs, distracts a kingdom ; infusing into those intrusted with the enactment of laws a spirit of rash innovation and daring empiricism, a disdain of the established usages of mankind, a foolish desire to dazzle the world with new and untried systems of policy, in which the prece-

dents of antiquity and the experience of ages are only consulted to be trodden under foot ; and into the executive department of government, a fierce contention for pre-eminence, an incessant struggle to supplant and destroy, with a propensity to calumny and suspicion, proscription and massacre.

We shall suffer the most eventful season ever witnessed in the affairs of men to pass over our heads to very little purpose, if we fail to learn from it some awful lessons on the nature and progress of the passions. The true light in which the French revolution ought to be contemplated, is that of a grand experiment on human nature. Among the various passions which that revolution has so strikingly displayed, none is more conspicuous than vanity ; nor is it less difficult, without adverting to the national character of the people, to account for its extraordinary predominance. Political power, the most seducing object of ambition, never before circulated through so many hands ; the prospect of possessing it was never before presented to so many minds. Multitudes who, by their birth and education, and not unfrequently by their talents, seemed destined to perpetual obscurity, were, by the alternate rise and fall of parties, elevated into distinction, and shared in the functions of government. The short-lived forms of power and office glided with such rapidity through successive ranks of degradation, from the court to the very dregs of the populace, that they seemed rather to solicit acceptance than to be a prize contended for. Yet, as it was still impossible for

all to possess authority, though none were willing to obey, a general impatience to break the ranks and rush into the foremost ground maddened and infuriated the nation, and overwhelmed, with the violence of a torrent, law, order, and civilisation.

If such be the mischiefs, both in public and private life, resulting from an excessive self-estimation, it remains next to be considered whether Providence has supplied any medicine to correct it; for as the reflection on excellencies, whether real or imaginary, is always attended with pleasure to the possessor, it is a disease deeply seated in our nature.

Suppose there were a great and glorious Being always present with us, who had given us existence with numberless other blessings, and on whom we depended each instant as well for every present enjoyment as for every future good; suppose again we had incurred the just displeasure of such a Being by ingratitude and disobedience, yet that in great mercy he had not cast us off, but had assured us he was willing to pardon and restore us on our humble entreaty and sincere repentance; say, would not an habitual sense of the presence of this Being, self-reproach for having displeased him, and an anxiety to recover his favour, be the most effectual antidote to pride? But such are the leading discoveries made by the Christian revelation, and such the dispositions which a practical belief of it inspires.

Humility is the first fruit of religion. In the mouth of our Lord there is no maxim so frequent as the following: "Whosoever exalteth himself shall

be abased, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted." Religion, and that alone, teaches *absolute* humility; by which I mean a sense of our *absolute* nothingness in the view of infinite greatness and excellence. That sense of inferiority which results from the comparison of men with each other, is often an unwelcome sentiment forced upon the mind, which may rather embitter the temper than soften it: that which devotion impresses is soothing and delightful. The devout man loves to lie low at the footstool of his Creator, because it is then he attains the most lively perceptions of the Divine excellence, and the most tranquil confidence in the Divine favour. In so august a presence he sees all distinctions lost, and all beings reduced to the same level. He looks at his superiors without envy, and his inferiors without contempt; and when from this elevation he descends to mix in society, the conviction of superiority, which must in many instances be felt, is a calm inference of the understanding, and no longer a busy, importunate passion of the heart.

"The wicked," says the Psalmist, "through the pride of their countenance, will not seek after God: God is not in all their thoughts." When we consider the incredible vanity of the atheistical sect, together with the settled malignity and unrelenting rancour with which they pursue every vestige of religion, is it uncandid to suppose that its humbling tendency is one principal cause of their enmity; that they are eager to displace a Deity from the minds of men, that they may occupy the void,—to crumble

the throne of the Eternal into dust, that they may elevate themselves on its ruins; and that, as their licentiousness is impatient of restraint, so their pride disdains a superior?

We mentioned a ferocity of character as one effect of sceptical impiety.—It is an inconvenience attending a controversy with those with whom we have few principles in common, that we are often in danger of reasoning inconclusively, from the want of its being clearly known and settled what our opponents admit, and what they deny. The persons, for example, with whom we are at present engaged, have discarded humility and modesty from the catalogue of virtues; on which account we have employed the more time in evincing their importance. But, whatever may be thought of humility as a *virtue*, it surely will not be denied that inhumanity is a most detestable *vice*; a vice, however, which scepticism has a most powerful tendency to inflame.

As we have already shown that pride hardens the heart, and that religion is the only effectual antidote, the connection between irreligion and inhumanity is in this view obvious. But there is another light in which this part of the subject may be viewed, in my humble opinion, much more important, though seldom adverted to. The supposition that man is a moral and accountable being, destined to survive the stroke of death, and to live in a future world in a never-ending state of happiness or misery, makes him a creature of incomparably more *consequence* than the opposite supposition. When we

consider him as placed here by an Almighty Ruler in a state of probation, and that the present life is his period of trial, the first link in a vast and interminable chain which stretches into eternity, he assumes a dignified character in our eyes; every thing which relates to him becomes interesting; and to trifle with his happiness is felt to be the most unpardonable levity. If such be the destination of man, it is evident that in the qualities which fit him for it his principal dignity consists: his moral greatness is his true greatness. Let the sceptical principles be admitted, which represent him, on the contrary, as the offspring of chance, connected with no superior power, and sinking into annihilation at death, and he is a contemptible creature, whose existence and happiness are insignificant. The characteristic difference is lost betwixt him and the brute creation, from which he is no longer distinguished, except by the vividness and multiplicity of his perceptions.

If we reflect on that part of our nature which disposes us to humanity, we shall find that, where we have no particular attachments, our sympathy with the sufferings and concern for the destruction of sensitive beings is in proportion to their supposed importance in the general scale, — or, in other words, to their supposed capacity of enjoyment. We feel, for example, much more at witnessing the destruction of a man than of an inferior animal, because we consider it as involving the extinction of a much greater sum of happiness. For

the same reason, he who would shudder at the slaughter of a large animal, will see a thousand insects perish without a pang. Our sympathy with the calamities of our fellow-creatures is adjusted to the same proportions: for we feel more powerfully affected with the distresses of fallen greatness, than with equal or greater distresses sustained by persons of inferior rank; because, having been accustomed to associate with an elevated station the idea of superior happiness, the loss appears the greater, and the wreck more extensive. But the disproportion in importance betwixt man and the meanest insect is not so great as that which subsists betwixt man considered as *mortal* and as *immortal*; that is, betwixt man as he is represented by the system of scepticism, and that of divine revelation: for the enjoyment of the meanest insect bears some proportion, though a very small one, to the present happiness of man; but the happiness of time bears none at all to that of eternity. The sceptical system, therefore, sinks the importance of human existence to an inconceivable degree.

From these principles results the following important inference, — that to extinguish human life by the hand of violence, must be quite a different thing in the eyes of a sceptic from what it is in those of a Christian. With the sceptic it is nothing more than diverting the course of a little red fluid called blood; it is merely lessening the number, by one, of many millions of fugitive, contemptible creatures. The Christian sees, in the same event, an accountable

being cut off from a state of probation, and hurried, perhaps unprepared, into the presence of his Judge, to hear that final, that irrevocable sentence, which is to fix him for ever in an unalterable condition of felicity or woe. The former perceives in death nothing but its physical circumstances; the latter is impressed with the magnitude of its moral consequences. It is the moral relation which man is supposed to bear to a superior power, the awful idea of accountability, the influence which his present dispositions and actions are conceived to have upon his eternal destiny, more than any superiority of intellectual powers abstracted from these considerations, which invest him with such mysterious grandeur, and constitute the firmest guard on the sanctuary of human life. This reasoning, it is sure, serves more *immediately* to show how the disbelief of a future state endangers the security of life: but though this be its *direct* consequence, it extends by analogy much further; since he who has learned to sport with the *lives* of his fellow-creatures will feel but little solicitude for their welfare in any other instance; but, as the greater includes the less, will easily pass from this to all the inferior gradations of barbarity.

As the advantage of the armed over the unarmed is not seen till the moment of attack, so in that tranquil state of society, in which law and order maintain their ascendancy, it is not perceived, perhaps not even suspected, to what an alarming degree the principles of modern infidelity leave us naked and defenceless. But let the state be con-

vulsed, let the mounds of regular authority be once overflowed, and the still small voice of law drowned in the tempest of popular fury (events which recent experience shows to be possible), it will then be seen that atheism is a school of ferocity ; and that having taught its disciples to consider mankind as little better than a nest of insects, they will be prepared, in the fierce conflicts of party, to trample upon them without pity, and extinguish them without remorse.

It was late before the atheism of Epicurus gained footing at Rome : but its prevalence was soon followed by such scenes of proscription, confiscation, and blood, as were *then* unparalleled in the history of the world ; from which the republic being never able to recover itself, after many unsuccessful struggles, exchanged liberty for repose, by submission to absolute power. Such were the effects of atheism at Rome. An attempt has been recently made to establish a similar system in France, the consequences of which are too well known to render it requisite for me to shock your feelings by a recital. The only doubt that can arise is, whether the barbarities which have stained the revolution in that unhappy country are justly chargeable on the prevalence of atheism. Let those who doubt of this recollect that the men who, by their activity and talents, prepared the minds of the people for that great change —VOLTAIRE, D'ALEMBERT, DIDEROT, ROUSSEAU, and others,—were avowed enemies of revelation ; that in all their writings the diffusion of

scepticism and revolutionary principles went hand in hand ; that the fury of the most sanguinary parties was especially pointed against the Christian priesthood and religious institutions, without once pretending, like other persecutors, to execute the vengeance of God (whose name they never mentioned) upon his enemies ; that their atrocities were committed with a wanton levity and brutal merriment ; that the reign of atheism was avowedly and expressly the reign of terror ; that in the full madness of their career, in the highest climax of their horrors, they shut up the temples of God, abolished his worship, and proclaimed death to be an eternal sleep, — as if, by pointing to the silence of the sepulchre, and the sleep of the dead, these ferocious barbarians meant to apologise for leaving neither sleep, quiet, nor repose to the living.

As the heathens fabled that Minerva issued full-armed from the head of Jupiter, so no sooner were the speculations of atheistical philosophy matured, than they gave birth to a ferocity which converted the most polished people in Europe into a horde of assassins, — the seat of voluptuous refinement, of pleasure, and of arts, into a theatre of blood.

It having already been shown that the principles of infidelity facilitate the commission of crimes by removing the restraints of fear ; and that they foster the arrogance of the individual, while they inculcate the most despicable opinion of the species ; the inevitable result is, that a haughty self-confidence, a contempt of mankind, together with a daring defi-

ance of religious restraints, are the natural ingredients of the atheistical character ; nor is it less evident that these are, of all others, the dispositions which most forcibly stimulate to violence and cruelty.

Settle it therefore in your minds, as a maxim never to be effaced or forgotten, that atheism is an inhuman, bloody, ferocious system, equally hostile to every useful restraint and to every virtuous affection ; that, leaving nothing above us to excite awe, nor round us to awaken tenderness, it wages war with heaven and with earth ; its first object is to dethrone God, its next to destroy man.

There is a third vice, not less destructive to society than either of those which have been already mentioned, to which the system of modern infidelity is favourable ; that is, unbridled sensuality, the licentious and unrestrained indulgence of those passions which are essential to the continuation of the species. — The magnitude of these passions, and their supreme importance to the existence as well as the peace and welfare of society, have rendered it one of the first objects of solicitude with every wise legislator, to restrain them by such laws, and to confine their indulgence within such limits, as shall best promote the great ends for which they were implanted.

The benevolence and wisdom of the Author of Christianity are eminently conspicuous in the laws he has enacted on this branch of morals : for, while he authorises marriage, he restrains the vagrancy

and caprice of the passions, by forbidding polygamy and divorce ; and well knowing that offences against the laws of chastity usually spring from an ill-regulated imagination, he inculcates purity of heart. Among innumerable benefits which the world has derived from the Christian religion, a superior refinement in the sexual sentiments, a more equal and respectful treatment of women, greater dignity and permanence conferred on the institution of marriage, are not the least considerable ; in consequence of which the purest affections, and the most sacred duties, are grafted on the stock of the strongest instincts.

The aim of all the leading champions of infidelity is to rob mankind of these benefits, and throw them back into a state of gross and brutal sensuality. In this same spirit Mr. HUME represents the private conduct of the profligate CHARLES, whose debaucheries polluted the age, as a just subject of panegyric. A disciple in the same school has lately had the unblushing effrontery to stigmatise marriage as the worst of all monopolies ; and, in a narrative of his licentious amours, to make a formal apology for departing from his principles, by submitting to its restraints. The popular productions on the continent, which issue from the atheistical school, are incessantly directed to the same purpose.

Under every possible aspect in which infidelity can be viewed, it extends the dominion of sensuality ; it repeals and abrogates every law by which Divine revelation has, under such awful sanctions, restrained

the indulgence of the passions. The disbelief of a supreme omniscient Being, which it inculcates, releases its disciples from an attention to the *heart*, from every care but the preservation of outward decorum ; and the exclusion of the devout affections, and an unseen world, leaves the mind immersed in visible, sensible objects.

There are two sorts of pleasures, corporeal and mental. Though we are indebted to the senses for all our perceptions *originally*, yet those which are at the furthest remove from their *immediate impressions* confer the most elevation on the character ; since, in proportion as they are multiplied and augmented, the slavish subjection to the senses is subdued. Hence the true and only antidote to debasing sensuality is the possession of a fund of that *kind of enjoyment* which is independent of the corporeal appetites. Inferior in the perfection of several of his senses to different parts of the brute creation, the superiority of man over them all consists in his superior power of multiplying by new combinations his mental perceptions, and thereby of creating to himself resources of happiness separate from external sensation. In the scale of enjoyment, the first remove from sense are the pleasures of reason and society ; the next are the pleasures of devotion and religion. The former, though totally distinct from those of sense, are yet less perfectly adapted to moderate their excesses than the last, as they are in a great measure conversant with visible and sensible objects. The religious affections and senti-

ments are, in fact, and were intended to be, the *proper antagonist* of sensuality; the great deliverer from the thralldom of the appetites, by opening a spiritual world, and inspiring hopes and fears, and consolations and joys, which bear no relation to the material and sensible universe. The criminal indulgence of sensual passions admits but of two modes of prevention; the establishment of such laws and maxims in society as shall render lewd profligacy impracticable or infamous, or the infusion of such principles and habits as shall render it distasteful. Human legislatures have encountered the disease in the first; the truths and sanctions of revealed religion, in the last of these methods: to both of which the advocates of modern infidelity are equally hostile.

So much has been said, by many able writers, to evince the inconceivable benefit of the marriage institution, that to hear it seriously attacked by men who style themselves philosophers, at the close of the eighteenth century, must awaken indignation and surprise. The object of this discourse leads us to direct our attention particularly to the influence of this institution on the *civilisation* of the world.

From the records of revelation we learn, that marriage, or the *permanent union* of the sexes, was ordained by God, and existed under different modifications in the early infancy of mankind, without which they could never have emerged from barbarism. For, conceive only what eternal discord, jealousy, and violence would ensue, were the objects

of the tenderest affections secured to their possessor by no law or tie of moral obligation ; were domestic enjoyments disturbed by incessant fear, and licentiousness inflamed by hope. Who could find sufficient tranquillity of mind to enable him to plan or execute any continued scheme of action, or what room for arts or sciences, or religion, or virtue, in that state in which the chief earthly happiness was exposed to every lawless invader ; where one was racked with an incessant anxiety to keep what the other was equally eager to acquire ? It is not probable in itself, independent of the light of Scripture, that the benevolent Author of the human race ever placed them in so wretched a condition at first : it is certain they could not remain in it long without being exterminated. Marriage, by shutting out these evils, and enabling every man to rest secure in his enjoyments, is the great civiliser of the world : with this security, the mind is at liberty to expand in generous affections, has leisure to look abroad, and engage in the pursuits of knowledge, science, and virtue.

Nor is it in this way only that marriage institutions are essential to the welfare of mankind. They are sources of tenderness, as well as the guardians of peace. Without the permanent union of the sexes, there can be no permanent families : the dissolution of nuptial ties involves the dissolution of domestic society. But domestic society is the seminary of social affections, the cradle of sensibility, where the first elements are acquired of that ten-

derness and humanity which cement mankind together, and which, were they entirely extinguished, the whole fabric of social institutions would dissolve.

Families are so many centres of attraction, which preserve mankind from being scattered and dissipated by the repulsive powers of selfishness. The order of nature is evermore from particulars to generals. As in the operations of intellect we proceed from the contemplation of individuals to the formation of general abstractions ; so in the developement of the passions, in like manner, we advance from private to public affections, — from the love of parents, brothers, and sisters, to those more expanded regards which embrace the immense society of human kind.

In order to render men benevolent, they must first be made tender : for benevolent affections are not the offspring of reasoning ; they result from that culture of the heart, from those early impressions of tenderness, gratitude, and sympathy, which the endearments of domestic life are sure to supply, and for the formation of which it is the best possible school.

The advocates of infidelity invert this eternal order of nature. Instead of inculcating the private affections, as a discipline by which the mind is prepared for those of a more public nature, they set them in direct opposition to each other ; they propose to build general benevolence on the destruction of individual tenderness, and to make us love the whole species more, by loving every particular part

of it less. In pursuit of this chimerical project, gratitude, humility, conjugal, parental, and filial affection, together with every other social disposition, are reprobated ; virtue is limited to a passionate attachment to the general good. Is it not natural to ask, when all the tenderness of life is extinguished, and all the bands of society are untwisted, from whence this ardent affection for the general good is to spring ?

When this savage philosophy has completed its work ; when it has taught its disciple to look with perfect indifference on the offspring of his body and the wife of his bosom, to estrange himself from his friends, insult his benefactors, and silence the pleadings of gratitude and pity,—will he, by thus divesting himself of all that is human, be better prepared for the disinterested love of his species ? Will he become a philanthropist only because he has ceased to be a man ? Rather, in this total exemption from all the feelings which humanise and soften, in this chilling frost of universal indifference, may we not be certain, selfishness unmingled and uncontrolled will assume the empire of his heart ; and that, under pretence of advancing the general good, an object to which the fancy may give innumerable shapes, he will be prepared for the violation of every duty, and the perpetration of every crime ? Extended benevolence is the last and most perfect fruit of the private affections ; so that to expect to reap the former from the extinction of the latter, is to oppose the means to the end, — is as absurd as to

attempt to reach the summit of the highest mountain without passing through the intermediate spaces, or to hope to attain the heights of science by forgetting the first elements of knowledge. These absurdities have sprung, however, in the advocates of infidelity, from an ignorance of human nature sufficient to disgrace even those who did not style themselves philosophers. Presuming, contrary to the experience of every moment, that the affections are awakened by *reasoning*, and perceiving that the general good is an incomparably greater object *in itself* than the happiness of any limited number of individuals, they inferred nothing more was necessary than to exhibit it in its just dimensions, to draw the *affections* towards it; as though the fact of the superior populousness of China to Great Britain needed but to be known to render us indifferent to our domestic concerns, and lead us to direct all our anxiety to the prosperity of that vast but remote empire.

It is not the province of reason to awaken new passions, or open new sources of sensibility; but to direct us in the attainment of those objects which nature has already rendered pleasing, or to determine among the interfering inclinations and passions which sway the mind which are the fittest to be preferred.

Is a regard to the general good then, you will reply, to be excluded from the motives of action? Nothing is more remote from my intention: but as the nature of this motive has, in my opinion, been much misunderstood by some good men, and

abused by others of a different description to the worst of purposes, permit me to declare in a few words what appears to me to be the truth on this subject.

The welfare of the whole system of being must be allowed to be, *in itself*, the object of all others the most worthy of being pursued; so that, could the mind distinctly embrace it, and discern at every step *what action* would infallibly promote it, we should be furnished with a sure criterion of right and wrong, an unerring guide, which would supersede the use and necessity of all inferior rules, laws, and principles.

But this being impossible, since the good of the *whole* is a motive so loose and indeterminate, and embraces such an infinity of relations, that before we could be certain what action is prescribed, the season of action would be past; to weak, short-sighted mortals, Providence has assigned a sphere of agency less grand and extensive indeed, but better suited to their limited powers, by implanting certain *affections* which it is their duty to cultivate, and suggesting particular rules to which they are bound to conform. By these provisions the boundaries of virtue are easily ascertained, at the same time that its ultimate object, the good of the whole, is secured: for, since the happiness of the entire system results from the happiness of the several parts, the affections, which confine the attention *immediately* to the latter, conspire in the end to the promotion of the former; as the labourer whose industry is limited to a corner of a large building,

performs his part towards rearing the structure much more effectually than if he extended his care to the whole.

As the interest, however, of any limited number of persons may not only not contribute, but may possibly be directly opposed, to the general good, (the interest of a family, for example, to that of a province, or of a nation to that of the world,) Providence has so ordered it, that in a well-regulated mind there springs up, as we have already seen, besides particular attachments, *an extended regard to the species*, whose office is two-fold: not to *destroy* and *extinguish* the more private affections, which is mental parricide; but first, as far as is consistent with the claims of those who are immediately committed to our care, *to do good to all men*; secondly, to exercise a jurisdiction and control over the private affections, so as to prohibit their indulgence whenever it would be attended with *manifest detriment* to the whole. Thus every part of our nature is brought into action; all the practical principles of the human heart find an element to move in, each in its different sort and manner conspiring, without mutual collisions, to maintain the harmony of the world and the happiness of the universe.

Before I close this discourse, I cannot omit to mention three circumstances attending the propagation of infidelity by its present abettors, equally new and alarming.

1. It is the first attempt which has been ever witnessed on an extensive scale to establish *the*

principles of atheism, the first effort which history has recorded to disannul and extinguish the belief of all superior powers; the consequence of which, should it succeed, would be to place mankind in a situation never before experienced, not even during the ages of pagan darkness.—The system of polytheism was as remote from modern infidelity as from true religion. Amidst that rubbish of superstition, the product of fear, ignorance, and vice, which had been accumulating for ages, some faint members of sacred truth remained unextinguished: the interposition of unseen powers in the affairs of men was believed and revered; the sanctity of oaths was maintained; the idea of *revelation* and of *tradition*, as a source of religious knowledge, was familiar; a usual persuasion of the existence of a future world was kept alive; and the greater gods were looked up to as the guardians of the public welfare, the patrons of those virtues which promote the prosperity of states, and the avengers of injustice, perfidy, and fraud.

Of whatever benefit superstition might formerly be productive, by the scattered particles of truth which it contained, these advantages can now only be reaped from the soil of true religion; nor is there any other alternative left than the belief of Christianity, or absolute atheism. In the revolutions of the human mind, exploded *opinions* are often revived; but an exploded superstition never recovers its credit. The pretension to divine revelation is so august and commanding, that when its falsehood is

once discerned, it is covered with all the ignominy of detected imposture : it falls from such a height (to change the figure) that it is inevitably crumbled into atoms. Religions, whether false or true, are not creatures of arbitrary institution. After discrediting the principles of piety, should our modern freethinkers find it necessary, in order to restrain the excesses of ferocity, to seek for a substitute in some popular superstition, it will prove a vain and impracticable attempt : they may recall the names, restore the altars, and revive the ceremonies ; but to rekindle the spirit of heathenism will exceed their power ; because it is impossible to enact ignorance by law, or to repeal by legislative authority the dictates of reason and the light of science.

2. The efforts of infidels to diffuse the principles of infidelity among the common people, is another alarming symptom peculiar to the present time. HUME, BOLINGBROKE and GIBBON addressed themselves solely to the more polished classes of the community ; and would have thought their refined speculations debased by an attempt to enlist disciples from among the populace. Infidelity has lately grown condescending : bred in the speculations of a daring philosophy, immured at first in the cloisters of the learned, and afterwards nursed in the lap of voluptuousness and of courts ; having at length reached its full maturity, it boldly ventures to challenge the suffrages of the people, solicits the acquaintance of peasants and mechanics, and seeks to draw whole nations to its standard.

It is not difficult to account for this new state of things. While infidelity was rare, it was employed as the instrument of literary vanity; its wide diffusion having disqualified it for answering that purpose, it is now adopted as the organ of political convulsion. Literary distinction is conferred by the approbation of a few; but the total subversion and overthrow of society demands the concurrence of millions.

3. The infidels of the present day are the first sophists who have presumed to innovate in the very *substance* of morals.—The disputes on moral questions hitherto agitated amongst philosophers have respected the *grounds* of duty, not the *nature of duty itself*; or they have been merely metaphysical, and related to the *history* of moral sentiments in the mind, the sources and principles from which they were most easily deduced; they never turned on the quality of those dispositions and actions which were to be denominated virtuous. In the firm persuasion that the love and fear of the Supreme Being, the sacred observation of promises and oaths, reverence to magistrates, obedience to parents, gratitude to benefactors, conjugal fidelity, and parental tenderness, were primary virtues, and the chief support of every commonwealth, they were unanimous. The curse denounced upon such as remove ancient landmarks, upon those who call good evil, and evil good; put light for darkness, and darkness for light; who employ their faculties to subvert the eternal distinctions of right and wrong, and thus to poison the streams of virtue at their source, falls with

accumulated weight on the advocates of modern infidelity, and on them alone.

Permit me to close this discourse with a few serious reflections. — There is much, it must be confessed, in the apostacy of multitudes, and the rapid progress of infidelity, to awaken our fears for the virtue of the rising generation ; but nothing to shake our faith, — nothing which Scripture itself does not give us room to expect. The features which compose the character of apostates, their profaneness, presumption, lewdness, impatience of subordination, restless appetite for change, vain pretensions to freedom and to emancipate the world, while themselves are the slaves of lust, the weapons with which they attack Christianity, and the snares they spread for the unwary, are depicted in the clearest colours by the pencil of prophecy. “ Knowing this first (says PETER), that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts.”* In the same Epistle he more fully describes the persons he alludes to ; “ as chiefly them which walk after the flesh, in the lust of uncleanness, and despise government ; presumptuous are they, self-willed, they are not afraid to speak evil of dignities ; sporting themselves in their own deceivings, having eyes full of adultery, and that cannot cease from sin ; beguiling unstable souls ; for when they speak great swelling words of vanity, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through much wantonness, those that were

* 2 Peter, iii. 3.

clean escaped from them who live in error; while they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption.”* Of the same character JUDE admonishes us to “remember that they were foretold as mockers, who should be in the last time, who should walk after their own ungodly lusts. These be they (he adds) who separate themselves, (by apostacy) sensual, not having the Spirit.” Infidelity is an evil of short duration. “It has (as a judicious writer observes) no individual subsistence given it in the system of prophecy. It is not a BEAST, but a mere putrid excrescence of the papal beast; an excrescence which, though it may diffuse death through every vein of the body on which it grew, yet shall die along with it.” Its enormities will hasten its overthrow. It is impossible that a system which, by vilifying every virtue, and embracing the patronage of almost every vice and crime, wages war with all the order and civilisation of the world,—which, equal to the establishment of nothing, is armed only with the energies of destruction, can long retain an ascendancy. It is in no shape formed for perpetuity. Sudden in its rise, and impetuous in its progress, it resembles a mountain-torrent, which is loud, filthy, and desolating; but, being fed by no perennial spring, is soon drained off, and disappears. By permitting to a certain extent the prevalence of infidelity, Providence is preparing new triumphs for religion. In asserting its authority, the preachers of

* 2 Peter, ii.

the Gospel have hitherto found it necessary to weigh the prospects of immortality against the interests of time ; to strip the world of its charms, to insist on the deceitfulness of pleasure, the unsatisfying nature of riches, the emptiness of grandeur, and the nothingness of a mere worldly life. Topics of this nature will always have their use ; but it is not by such representations alone that the importance of religion is evinced. The prevalence of impiety has armed us with new weapons in its defence.

Religion being primarily intended to make men *wise unto salvation*, the support it ministers to social order, the stability it confers on government and laws, is a *subordinate species* of advantage which we should have continued to enjoy without reflecting on its cause, but for the development of deistical principles, and the experiment which has been made of their effects in a neighbouring country. It had been the constant boast of infidels, that their system, more liberal and generous than Christianity, needed but to be tried to produce an immense accession to human happiness ; and Christian nations, careless and supine, retaining little of religion but the profession, and disgusted with its restraints, lent a favourable ear to these pretensions. God permitted the trial to be made. In one country, and that the centre of Christendom, revelation underwent a total eclipse ; while atheism, performing on a darkened theatre its strange and fearful tragedy, confounded the first elements of society, blended every age, rank, and sex, in indiscriminate proscription and massacre, and

convulsed all Europe to its centre; that the imperishable memorial of these events might teach the last generations of mankind to consider religion as the pillar of society, the safeguard of nations, the parent of social order, which alone has power to curb the fury of the passions, and secure to every one his rights,—to the laborious the reward of their industry, to the rich the enjoyment of their wealth, to nobles the preservation of their honours, and to princes the stability of their thrones.

We might ask the patrons of infidelity what fury impels them to attempt the subversion of Christianity? Is it that they have discovered a better system? To what virtues are their principles favourable? Or is there one which Christians have not carried to a higher perfection than any of which their party can boast? Have they discovered a more excellent rule of life, or a better hope in death, than that which the Scriptures suggest? Above all, what are the pretensions on which they rest their claims to be the guides of mankind; or which embolden them to expect we should trample upon the experience of ages, and abandon a religion which has been attested by a train of miracles and prophecies, in which millions of our forefathers have found a refuge in every trouble, and consolation in the hour of death; a religion which has been adorned with the highest sanctity of character and splendour of talents; which enrols amongst its disciples the names of BACON, NEWTON, and LOCKE, the glory of their species; and to which these illustrious men

were proud to dedicate the last and best fruits of their immortal genius?

If the question at issue is to be decided by argument, nothing can be added to the triumph of Christianity; if by an appeal to authority, what have our adversaries to oppose to these great names? Where are the infidels of such pure, uncontaminated morals, unshaken probity, and extended benevolence, that we should be in danger of being seduced into impiety by their example? Into what obscure recesses of misery, into what dungeons have their philanthropists penetrated, to lighten the fetters and relieve the sorrows of the helpless captive? What barbarous tribes have their apostles visited? What distant climes have *they* explored, encompassed with cold, nakedness, and want, to diffuse principles of virtue, and the blessings of civilisation? Or will they rather choose to wave their pretensions to this extraordinary, and in their eyes eccentric, species of benevolence, (for infidels, we know, are sworn enemies to enthusiasm of every sort,) and rest their character on their political exploits; on their efforts to reanimate the virtue of a sinking state, to restrain licentiousness, to calm the tumult of popular fury; and by inculcating the spirit of justice, moderation, and pity for fallen greatness, to mitigate the inevitable horrors of revolution? Our adversaries will at least have the discretion, if not the modesty, to recede from this test.

More than all, their infatuated eagerness, their parricidal zeal to extinguish a sense of Deity, must

excite astonishment and horror. Is the idea of an almighty and perfect Ruler unfriendly to any passion which is consistent with innocence, or an obstruction to any design which it is not shameful to avow? Eternal God, on what are thine enemies intent! What are those enterprises of guilt and horror, that, for the safety of their performers, require to be enveloped in a darkness which the eye of heaven must not pierce! — Miserable men! Proud of being the offspring of chance; in love with universal disorder; whose happiness is involved in the belief of there being no witness to their designs; and who are at ease only because they suppose themselves inhabitants of a forsaken and fatherless world!

Having been led, by the nature of the subject, to consider chiefly the manner in which sceptical impiety affects the welfare of states, it is the more requisite to warn you against that most fatal mistake of regarding religion as an engine of policy, and to recal to your recollection that the concern we have in it is much more as *individuals* than as *collective bodies*, and far less temporal than eternal. The happiness which it confers in the present life are blessings which it scatters by the way in its march to immortality. That future condition of being which it ascertains, and for which its promises and truths are meant to prepare us, is the ultimate end of human societies, the final scope and object of present existence; in comparison of which all the revolutions of nations, and all the vicissitudes of time,

are light and transitory. *Godliness has*, it is true, *the promise of the life that now is ; but chiefly of that which is to come.* Other acquisitions may be requisite to make men great ; but be assured the religion of Jesus is alone sufficient to make them good and happy. Powerful sources of consolation in sorrow, unshaken fortitude amidst the changes and perturbations of the world, humility remote from meanness, and dignity unstained by pride ; contentment in every station ; passions pure and calm, with habitual serenity ; the full enjoyment of life undisturbed by the dread of dissolution or the fear of an hereafter, are its invaluable gifts. To these enjoyments, however, you will necessarily continue strangers, unless you resign yourselves wholly to its power ; for the consolations of religion are reserved to reward, to sweeten, and to stimulate obedience. Many, without renouncing the profession of Christianity, without formally rejecting its distinguishing doctrines, live in such an habitual violation of its laws, and contradiction to its spirit, that, conscious they have more to fear than to hope from its truth, they are never able to contemplate it without terror. It haunts their imagination, instead of tranquillising their hearts, and hangs with depressing weight on all their enjoyments and pursuits. Their religion, instead of comforting them under their troubles, is itself their greatest trouble, from which they seek refuge in the dissipation and vanity of the world, until the throbs and tumults of conscience force them back upon religion. Thus suspended betwixt

opposite powers, the sport of contradictory influences, they are disqualified for the happiness of both worlds; and neither enjoy the pleasures of sin, nor the peace of piety. Is it surprising to find a mind thus bewildered in uncertainty, and dissatisfied with itself, court deception, and embrace with eagerness every pretext to mutilate the claims and enervate the authority of Christianity; forgetting that it is of the very essence of the religious principle to pre-*side* and control, and that it is impossible to *serve God and mammon*? It is this class of professors who are chiefly in danger of being entangled in the snares of infidelity.

The champions of infidelity have much more reason to be ashamed than to boast of such converts. For what can be a stronger presumption of the falsehood of a system, than that it is the opiate of a restless conscience; that it prevails with minds of a certain description, not because they find it true, but because they feel it necessary; and that, in adopting it, they consult less with their reason than with their vices and their fears? It requires but little sagacity to foresee that speculations which originate in guilt must end in ruin. Infidels are not themselves satisfied with the truth of their system: for had they any settled assurance of its principles, in consequence of calm dispassionate investigation, they would never disturb the quiet of the world by their attempts to proselyte; but would lament their own infelicity, in not being able to perceive sufficient evidence for the truth of religion, which furnishes

such incentives to virtue, and inspires such exalted hopes. Having nothing to substitute in the place of religion, it is absurd to suppose that, in opposition to the collective voice of every country, age, and time, proclaiming its necessity, solicitude for the welfare of mankind impels them to destroy it.

To very different motives must their conduct be imputed. More like conspirators than philosophers, in spite of the darkness with which they endeavour to surround themselves, some rays of unwelcome conviction will penetrate, some secret apprehensions that all is not right will make themselves felt, which they find nothing so effectual to quell as an attempt to enlist fresh disciples, who, in exchange for new principles, impart confidence, and diminish fear. For the same reason it is seldom they attack Christianity by argument; their favourite weapons are ridicule, obscenity, and blasphemy; as the most miserable outcasts of society are, of all men, found most to delight in vulgar merriment and senseless riot.

Jesus Christ seems to have "his fan in his hand, and to be thoroughly purging his floor;" and nominal Christians will probably be scattered like chaff. But has *real* Christianity any thing to fear? Have not the degenerate manners and corrupt lives of multitudes in the visible church been, on the contrary, the principal occasion of scandal and offence? Infidelity, without intending it, is gradually removing this reproach: possessing the property of attracting to itself the morbid humours which pervade the

church, until the Christian profession on the one hand is reduced to a sound and healthy state, and scepticism on the other exhibits nothing but a mass of putridity and disease.

In a view of the final issue of the contest, we should find little cause to lament the astonishing prevalence of infidelity, but for a solicitude for the rising generation, to whom its principles are recommended by two motives, with young minds the most persuasive — the love of independence, and the love of pleasure. With respect to the first, we would earnestly entreat the young to remember, that by the unanimous consent of all ages, modesty, docility, and reverence to superior years, and to parents above all, have been considered as their *appropriate virtues*, a guard assigned by the immutable laws of God and nature on the inexperience of youth ; and, with respect to the second, that Christianity prohibits no pleasures that are innocent, imposes no restraints that are capricious ; but that the sobriety and purity which it enjoins, by strengthening the intellectual powers, and preserving the faculties of mind and body in undiminished vigour, lay *the surest* foundation of present peace and future eminence. At such a season as this it becomes an urgent duty on parents, guardians, and tutors, to watch, not only over the morals, but the principles of those committed to their care ; to make it appear that a concern for their eternal welfare is their chief concern ; and to imbue them early with that knowledge of the evidences of Christianity, and that profound rever-

ence for the Scriptures, that, with the blessing of God, (which with submission they may then expect,) “ may keep them from this hour of temptation that has come on all the world, to try them that dwell on the earth.”

To an attentive observer of the signs of the times, it will appear one of the most extraordinary phenomena of this eventful crisis, that, amidst the ravages of atheism and infidelity, real religion is evidently on the increase. “ The kingdom of God,” we know, “ cometh not with observation ;” but still there are not wanting manifest tokens of its approach. The personal appearance of the Son of God was announced by the shaking of nations ; his spiritual kingdom, in all probability, will be established in the midst of similar convulsions and disorders. The blasphemous impiety of the enemies of God, as well as the zealous efforts of his sincere worshippers, will doubtless be overruled to accomplish the purposes of his unerring providence ; while, in inflicting the chastisements of offended Deity on corrupt communities and nations, infidelity marks its progress by devastation and ruin, by the prostration of thrones and concussion of kingdoms ; thus appalling the inhabitants of the world, and compelling them to take refuge in the church of God, the true sanctuary ; the stream of divine knowledge, unobserved, is flowing in new channels, winding its course among humble valleys, refreshing thirsty deserts, and enriching with far other and higher blessings than those of commerce, the most distant climes and nations, un-

til, agreeably to the prediction of prophecy, the “knowledge of the Lord shall fill and cover the whole earth.”

Within the limits of this discourse it would be impracticable to exhibit the evidences of Christianity ; nor is it my design : but there is one consideration, resulting immediately from my text, which is entitled to great weight with all who believe in the one living and true God, as the sole object of worship. The Ephesians, in common with other Gentiles, are described in the text as being, previous to their conversion, “without God in the world ;” that is, without any just and solid acquaintance with his character, destitute of the knowledge of his will, the institutes of his worship, and the hopes of his favour ; to the truth of which representation whoever possesses the slightest acquaintance with pagan antiquity must assent. Nor is it a fact less incontestable, that, while human philosophy was never able to abolish idolatry in a single village, the promulgation of the Gospel overthrew it in a great part (and that the most enlightened) of the world. If our belief in the unity and perfections of God, together with his moral government, and exclusive right to the worship of mankind, be founded in truth, it cannot reasonably be denied to be truth of the first importance, and infinitely to outweigh the greatest discoveries in science ; because they turn the hopes, fears, and interests of man into a totally different channel from that in which they must otherwise flow. Wherever these principles are first

admitted, there a new dominion is erected, and a new system of laws established.

But since all events are under divine direction, is it reasonable to suppose that the great Parent, after suffering his creatures to continue for ages ignorant of his true character, should at length, in the course of his providence, fix upon falsehood, and that alone, as the effectual method of making himself known; and that what the virtuous exercise of reason in the best and wisest men was never permitted to accomplish, he should confer on fraud and delusion the honour of effecting? It ill comports with the majesty of truth, or the character of God, to believe he has built the noblest superstructure on the weakest foundation; or reduced mankind to the miserable alternative either of remaining destitute of the knowledge of himself, or of deriving it from the polluted source of impious imposture. We therefore feel ourselves justified, on this occasion, in adopting the triumphant boast of the great apostle:—"Where is the wise, where is the scribe, where is the disputer of this world? Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For after that, in the wisdom of God, the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe."

ANDREW IRVINE, B.D.

LATE CHAPLAIN OF THE TOWER HAMLETS, AND ASSISTANT
AT THE TEMPLE ;—NOW VICAR OF ST. MARGARET'S,
LEICESTER.

The volume of Sermons, from which the two ensuing have been selected, was published in 1830, 8vo. ; and contains the discourses which the Author preached at the *Temple Church*. The attentive reader of these discourses will, perhaps, from their excellence, regret their brevity ; but they will not be the less conducive to valuable purposes from *such* a characteristic. A fair specimen of their general merits may be formed by those here given ; and although, at first sight, the subject of the *Millennium* may appear a little fanciful, if not intrusive, it cannot be denied that the Author has treated it in a vigorous and luminous manner, and in perfect consonance with the soundest scriptural views upon the subject.

Mr. Irvine is now called to a very large and active sphere of duty, where his talents cannot fail to be successfully exerted, and his labours essentially to promote the welfare of Christian souls.

THE MILLENNIUM.

I PETER, i. 10, 11.

Of which salvation the prophets have enquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow.

ST. PETER, in addressing the Christian converts, who were dispersed through a great part of Asia Minor, blesses God, who, "by the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, had begotten them again to the lively hope of an inheritance eternal in the heavens." He assures them that, as this immortal inheritance had not been purchased with corruptible things, as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, so would it be secured to them by his ever living to bestow it upon those "who should be kept through faith unto that salvation," which was ready to be revealed in the last time, or, in other words, at the end of the world. He thence suggests to them the consolatory reflection, that however afflicted they might be in this mortal state, such trial of their faith would ultimately redound unto "praise and honour and glory, at the final

appearing of Jesus Christ." Their belief in this invisible Saviour he pronounces to be so strong, that "they rejoiced with joy unspeakable, receiving the end or object of their faith, even the salvation of their souls." For that salvation which could only be considered as fully completed at the reappearance of Jesus Christ, was already assured to them through faith, which is "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." Of the first purchase and ultimate completion of that salvation, "the Spirit of Christ, which was in the ancient prophets, testified," foreshowing the sufferings that should come upon him at his first manifestation as the Saviour of men, and the subsequent glory of his second coming as Judge of all.

St. Peter represents those prophets as "searching, if haply they might discover to what time or what manner of time the Spirit in them was pointing;" when it exhibited those prospects of blessedness which were afterwards more fully revealed by our Saviour and his apostles in the gospel; and which he declares to be a subject of earnest contemplation even to the angels of God. Those ancient prophets were naturally desirous to comprehend distinctly the events which they foretold, and to ascertain the period of their accomplishment; but the dimness of that vision which, though clearly displayed to future ages, *they* were permitted but obscurely to behold, is a strong admonition to all, to guard against that adventurous boldness, with which many persons in the present age presume to intrude them-

selves into the hidden counsels of the Eternal, and rashly to promulgate their interpretations of his future purposes as matters of demonstrable certainty. They forget, as has been well observed by a distinguished prelate, that “the knowledge given by prophecy was not intended to convey more information than was necessary for raising expectation *before* the event, and for proving, *after* the event, that the expectation was well founded.” *

As the evils resulting from such conduct are great and manifold, it shall be my endeavour, in this discourse, to show the necessity of interpreting with the utmost caution such scripture prophecies concerning the future state of the Christian church as remain still unaccomplished.

In consequence of the predictions of their prophets, the whole Jewish nation longed earnestly for the promised Messiah; who, as they falsely imagined, would enable them to gratify their two leading passions, — the love of gain and the love of power. The intensity of those passions was increased by the privations which they suffered from the exactions of the publicans, and oppressions of their governors, who made them fully sensible of the galling weight of the Roman yoke. They accordingly represented their expected deliverer as one who would relieve every want, supply every luxury, and exalt them to ample wealth and extensive sway. Through this darkened medium of interest, preju-

* Van Mildert's Boyle's Lectures, Sermon xxii.

dice and passion, they contemplated the prophecies, and gave them a corresponding interpretation. Thus, even while they seemed to be walking under the guidance of Moses and the prophets, who pointed them directly to Christ, they were quite unable to recognise Him “of whom Moses and all the prophets spake.”

So addicted were they to a *literal*, rather than a *spiritual* interpretation, that they were subjected to the pointed animadversion of our Saviour, when they asked, “How shall this man give us his flesh to eat?” “The words that I speak unto you,” said he, “they are *spirit*, and they are life.”* Their very knowledge, or supposed knowledge, of the place of his birth, proved to them a stumbling-block. For they cherished a notion, quite unauthorised by heaven, that “no man should know whence Christ came.”† They also believed, relying on prophecy, but, as the event proved, on prophecy erroneously interpreted, that Elijah would come with distinguished pomp; and therefore they received not the testimony of the Baptist, who “came in his spirit and his power.” For, by artfully glossing some texts, and misinterpreting others, they figured to themselves *their* Christ in a form so entirely adapted to their own favourite notions, that when he actually came, and “spake as never man spake,” when he did wonders such as never man performed, “they hardened their hearts, and saw not with their eyes,

* John, vi. 52. 63.

† John, vii. 27.

nor heard with their ears," nor perceived the fulfilment of prophecy, though it was blazoned with the bright beam of Divinity to public view ; but denied and utterly rejected the Messiah, and nailed him to the cross.

Such was the perversion of prophecy by the Jews of old, and such it continues among their descendants to the present hour. Upon that subject, however, we will not at present dwell, but merely notice the very remarkable fact, that many of the errors with regard to prophecy, which prevailed among the *primitive Christians*, and still continue to prevail, were derived from the Jews themselves. My object, in adverting to their error at all, is to show the *danger* of certain Christian imitators of that Jewish example, in their interpretation of the prophecies which relate to the second coming of our Lord, and to the future state of the Christian Church, which is his spiritual kingdom. For they have specified, with greater hardihood than even the Jews themselves, the times, and the seasons, and the manner of his coming, and the nature of his reign. Although the ancient believers in the Millennium, as well as many at a more recent period, having indiscreetly fixed the date of its commencement within their own time, had seen their interpretations falsified by the event, their successors, notwithstanding, have woven again the same flimsy texture of interpretation, forming theories the most chimerical ; expatiating in the wide field of conjecture, and sometimes even laying such daring and

presumptuous claim to inspiration itself, as might almost seem to imply a judgment upon them from Him “who maketh diviners mad.” Were this error confined only to a *few*, it were best perhaps to pass by it unregarded. But when it is in various forms disseminated by them through all classes of society, with a zeal and industry daily increasing, it becomes us to “enquire and search diligently,” whether there be in scripture any sufficient warrant for their doctrines.

To enter upon an examination of the various theories adduced, is utterly foreign to my present purpose. But it is impossible not to advert to the foundation and corner-stone of them all, namely, that prophecy in the twentieth chapter of the Revelation of St. John, in which he asserts that he “saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and that they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years; and that this was the *first* resurrection.” The authors of these theories assert, that by interpreting this passage in a figurative and spiritual sense, as the ablest commentators have done, we explain away also the *second* or general resurrection. Such might perhaps be the consequence, were the general resurrection no where else mentioned in scripture. But the proofs of it are so numerous and so direct, propounded in such simple and emphatic terms by our Saviour in the gospel, and by the apostles in their writings, as would have demanded our belief, and been equally entitled to it, although the Apocalypse had never been written.

But even taking the text in its most literal sense, it does not justify the conclusion drawn from it with regard to the resurrection of the Christian martyrs. For St. John declares that he beheld, in vision, “the *souls* only of those who were beheaded for the witness of Jesus;” but of their *bodies* nothing is said. To their *material* part there is not even the least shadow of allusion. *What* the change is, which is here indicated with regard to their spiritual nature, may be difficult to conjecture, and will probably remain inexplicable till ascertained by the event. But it is quite undeniable, that those who value themselves peculiarly upon their adherence to literal interpretation, here decidedly exceed that which is indicated by the letter itself. For with regard to the revival of the body, at what he terms the first resurrection, St. John not only observes a profound silence, but distinctly states that what he saw was not the *bodies* of the martyrs; not the martyrs themselves composed of soul and body together; but specifically the *souls*, and the souls only, of “those who were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God.” The inference to be deduced from this remarkable fact is still more forcibly impressed by another equally remarkable — that in every other part of Scripture where the resurrection is mentioned, it universally and exclusively refers to the body.

Without, however, proceeding to a minute discussion of particulars, it appears preferable to state generally a few circumstances, which should lead

us either entirely to reject such doctrines, or to be extremely cautious in giving them the remotest assent.

A maxim is laid down by St. Peter, to which, in all enquiries of this nature, we can never too closely adhere — that “no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation *,” — or, in other words, inconsistent with the general tenour of Revelation. If, therefore, any doctrine is deduced from prophecy, irreconcilable with what has been established by our Lord as an unquestionable principle, that deduction must, of necessity, be false.

I need scarcely remind you, that no principle was ever more distinctly and repeatedly inculcated by our Saviour than the entire *spirituality* of his kingdom. “My kingdom is not of this world †,” was his own specific and authoritative testimony. Yet was it in direct contradiction to this declaration that the Jews hailed him as Messiah, their temporal king. It is in equally direct contradiction to it, that many professing Christians, at the present day, anticipate his reign with his saints upon earth for a thousand years. And, what is not a little singular, the advocates of this doctrine generally agree in describing the *seat* of Christ’s empire to be in the city of Jerusalem — in that very spot where he had himself given the most express denial of it. Papias‡,

* 2 Peter, i. 20.

† John, xviii. 36.

‡ Euseb. Eccl. Hist. l. iii. c. 39. p. 137. See also Routh, Rel. Sac. i. p. 32.

the first propagator of the doctrine, asserts that Christ would reign in bodily form upon earth; and many of his followers represented it not only as a sovereignty over many subject nations, but as a state of luxurious sensual delight*; fitter for the paradise of Mahomet and his dissolute votaries†, than for those who are accustomed to “look for a kingdom not made with hands, immortal in the heavens.” So strongly indeed did they avow those doctrines, that the more pious Christians among them were ashamed that such statements should reach the ears of the heathens. But however they might shrink from the consequence, it was undeniable that a too literal interpretation of many passages in Scripture, respecting Messiah’s kingdom, led them by an inevitable inference to such conclusions.

Among the modern supporters of the doctrine, such consequences are generally passed over in silence. The more prudent among them venture not explicitly to declare “how these things will be.” In attempting therefore to remove one difficulty, they create many more, quite inexplicable. Now, these difficulties are avoided by the advocates for the *figurative* and *spiritual* sense, who contend that the Christian church, upon the conversion of the Jews and a great accession of Gentile converts, will enjoy a more glorious state of peace and purity

* Routh, Rel. Sac. i. pp. 9. 11. 27.

† For ample illustrations of the truth of these assertions, see Whitby’s “Treatise of the True Millennium.”

under the spiritual reign of Christ, than it has ever before experienced. For the empire of darkness will then be abridged, so that Satan may be said “to be bound a thousand years;” and as the Baptist, the forerunner of Christ, was in ancient prophecy denominated Elijah, because he “came in the spirit and power of Elijah;” so may the souls of the primitive martyrs be said to live and reign with Christ a thousand years; because the spirit and principles of those martyrs will animate the Christian church during a long period of unexampled spiritual prosperity.

This interpretation entirely accords with the general language of Scripture, in which the restoration of the church to glory and power is represented by the prophet as life from the dead*; and also most expressly by St. Paul himself, when speaking of the accession of the Jews to the Christian faith.† This is that *spiritual kingdom* which our Lord has uniformly asserted to be his own. That *temporal* power, therefore, which he has universally disclaimed‡, cannot be received as the doctrine of Scripture upon such very questionable evidence. The two are utterly irreconcilable; and it seems bordering on presumption, if not impiety, to draw from the description of a *vision* naturally expressed in language highly figurative, a conclusion directly opposed to our Lord’s most explicit and repeated

* Hos. vi. 2. Ezek. xxxvii. 11—14.

† Rom. xi. 15.

‡ John, xviii. 36.

assertion, and which, therefore, as Christian believers, we should feel ourselves bound to reject.

Nor is the temporal reign of Christ and the saints upon earth more inconsistent with the direct declarations of Scripture, that his kingdom is exclusively spiritual, than with those hopes and prospects which it constantly holds out to all true Christians, and with those graces and dispositions of mind which it uniformly requires as conditions and qualifications for enjoying them. We are instructed “not to love the world, neither the things that are in the world* ;” “to set our affection on things above, not on things upon the earth† ;” “to seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God,” “to look at things not temporal but eternal‡ ,” “to lay up treasures in heaven, from whence also we look for the Saviour.” § In the whole of these objects of our high calling there is no allusion to earthly recompense,—no admixture of worldly motive. And when we consider the richness and immensity of the reward, and its infinite superiority to every thing that “eye hath seen or heart conceived,” we are ready to exclaim with the Fathers of the Church, “If the inheritance of the martyrs be in heaven, their reign on earth is no better than a fable !” To the attainment of that immortal crown all their views were directed ; their minds soared to the regions above, their thoughts assumed a

* 1 John, ii. 15. † Col. iii. 2. ‡ 2 Cor. iv. 18.

§ Matt. vi. 20. and Phil. iii. 20.

loftier range, their hearts a purer glow, their graces and virtues a more vigorous and energetic expansion. Could there have been held forth to them, in the hour of their suffering, all the wealth and power that the most favoured of the sons of men ever enjoyed upon earth, how poor, how unsatisfactory, how infinitely short of what they had conceived of the inexhaustible treasures of eternity! Or if we could imagine their departed spirits recalled from that state of bliss in which our Saviour hath represented the Father of the Faithful *, and those who after death tasted with him the joys of Paradise, to be placed in that land of Canaan, which he and the faithful Patriarchs had already despised, in comparison of “a better, — *a heavenly country* †,” would it not be felt as a degradation from their high estate — a change utterly unfit for their celestial nature?

If we refer for a practical illustration of the truth of these remarks to the feelings and hopes of the most distinguished men that ever wore a martyr's crown — St. Peter and St. Paul — it seems hardly possible that there should remain a single doubt upon the subject. For the hopes that animated St. Paul, in the full anticipation of that martyrdom which awaited him from the cruelty of Nero, he thus expresses, in a tone of triumphant exultation: “I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I

* Luke, xvi. 22.

† Heb. xi. 16.

have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness which the Lord the righteous Judge shall give me at that day; and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing."* There is no mention of any temporal reward, of none but that which will be conferred at the day of judgment; nor of any different in its kind from that which awaited every sincere Christian. But to withdraw the Apostle from the bliss of Paradise to this transitory scene of earthly grandeur for a thousand years, if we may judge from the result of his own experience, must resemble less a reward than a punishment. For when, in the days of his flesh, he had been admitted for only a short period to the joys of Paradise†, he was so elevated by its ineffable mysteries, so utterly exalted beyond measure, that a severe visitation of Providence became necessary to remedy the evils which thus threatened his spiritual welfare.

Nor does it appear that St. Peter ever contemplated his entrance into any other kingdom than the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. For on the eve of his martyrdom, which, as we find in the conclusion of St. John's Gospel‡, had been foretold by our Saviour himself, he declares his perfect knowledge that he was under the indispensable necessity of "speedily

* 2 Tim. iv. 6—8.

† 2 Cor. xii. 4. 7.

‡ John, xx. 18, 19.

putting off his earthly tabernacle, as the Lord Jesus Christ had showed him.”* But he makes not the remotest allusion to a *temporal sovereignty* either of a thousand years, or of any other period. Yet, had there been in his mind the slightest ground for such allusion, he would doubtless have stated it in this Epistle; in which he enters so fully and so earnestly upon the animating and glorious theme of the *coming* of Christ. He shows that, with regard to his first advent, the Apostles had not “followed cunningly devised fables, but were eye-witnesses of his majesty on the Mount;” and with regard to his second advent, he asserts that there “was a more sure word of prophecy, to which they would do well to take heed†,” and not be misled by private and defective interpretation. He further declares, in the beginning of the third chapter, that the object of his second Epistle was to “stir up their pure minds, to be mindful of those things spoken before by the holy Prophets, and of the commandments of the Apostles of the Lord and Saviour;” and to shun the doctrine of the infidel scoffers who derided our Saviour’s coming. The Day of that awful event he then describes in terms of the most overpowering sublimity; but makes not the remotest allusion to any other day than that which should come silently and suddenly, “as a thief in the night.” He declares that “he looked for and hasted unto that day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall

* 2 Pet. i. 14.

† 2 Pet. i. 16. 19.

be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat." But of any previous coming of Christ he is utterly silent, and of any earthly reward he gives not the slightest indication. The reward, — the sole reward, which he looked for, was that which the whole tenour of Scripture had uniformly exhibited — a glorious immortality beyond death and the grave — "a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."

Thus does it appear that the direct tenour of Revelation is opposed to this doctrine; and Scripture cannot be inconsistent with Scripture. But those who maintain this favourite speculation, instead of abiding by the *general tenour*, adopt the *exception*, bending other passages to a forced accommodation with it, and wresting the word of God, if not to their own destruction, at least to the complete delusion of themselves and their followers.

The *evils* resulting from these errors concerning the Millennium are great and numerous. For the very best that can be said of it is, that with some it is a merely *speculative* opinion — a visionary dream — entirely unconnected with our salvation — productive neither of benefit nor injury to mankind. Yet, even when merely speculative, harmless it can hardly be. For it tends to cast a ridicule upon religion, and particularly upon *Prophecy*, that mighty pillar of Revelation — that permanent miracle and conspicuous monument of the divine foreknowledge to the end of time — since it leads

infidels to scoff, and the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme !

But it has often assumed an active, *practical* form, and never with greater external violence than in this very country, or accompanied with effects more directly subversive of the peace, order, and happiness of society. For there is no page in our history more dark or revolting, than that which records the outrageous daring of those enthusiasts and fanatics, who lived in the daily and avowed expectation of Messiah's entrance upon his earthly kingdom, in which they had promised to themselves a distinguished station.* Though those dangers are now past, who shall be bold enough to say that they may never again recur ? The spirit of fanaticism, though differently modified by circumstances, is in every age the *same*; and the language of many advocates of the doctrine, at this day, shows that the flame, though smothered and repressed, is neither quenched nor extinguished.

Let us then, adhering with inflexible firmness to the principles and doctrines *clearly* promulgated in the Gospel, shun those theories which are at once visionary and obscure, dangerous and unprofitable. Let us cherish that meek disposition of mind, which presumes not to intrude into the hidden counsels of the Eternal, but sinks back into its own conscious weakness ; ever remembering, with thankfulness, that though much remains to us entirely unknown,

* Hume's Hist. of Eng. vii. cc. 60. 63.

enough has been revealed to confirm faith, to animate hope, and to call forth into exercise the best graces and virtues that can adorn the Christian character. And when, like Daniel, who heard, but understood not the “wonders” foretold by “the man who held up his right hand and his left hand unto heaven,” confirming the period of their accomplishment by a solemn oath; — when like Daniel we are impelled by ardent curiosity to inquire, “O my Lord, what shall be the end of these things?” — then let us listen to the salutary counsel of Him who declared to the Prophet that they were wrapped in darkness, for the trial of patient expectation, till their final completion. “Go thy way, Daniel; for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end. Blessed is he that waiteth. But go thou thy way till the end be: for thou shalt rest, and stand in thy lot at the end of the days.”*

* _Dan. xii. 9. 13.

PERSONALITY AND OFFICE OF THE
HOLY SPIRIT.*

EPHESIANS, iv. 30.

And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God by which you are sealed unto the day of redemption.

By the light of nature we perceive in our spiritual constitution defects so evidently resulting from an inherent principle of corruption, that it can neither be mistaken nor denied. But though these defects are visible, and their baneful cause too certain, it surpasses the power of man to discover the remedy. For one of the most fatal consequences, flowing from this original corruption, is the blindness of our understanding in the discernment of spiritual things. Unassisted reason finding its powers unequal to the task, soon surrendered itself to the guidance of a vain imagination, which still further darkened that which was already obscure, and perplexed that which was already intricate. Man wandered farther and farther from his God; the clouds that intercepted the view of his true happiness became thicker and darker, until it pleased the Most High

* Preached on Whitsunday.

to disperse them in his mercy by the light of Revelation.

A dispensation so full of grace and goodness, was eminently calculated to promote our spiritual welfare; and were there no other evidence that the Christian Revelation is divine, the perfect *adaptation* of it to our wants and woes, to our hopes and fears, to our capacities and powers, and to all the diversified circumstances of our common nature, would demonstrate most clearly that it proceeded from him who made man, who knows what is in man, and who alone can discover by His wisdom a remedy as powerful and extensive as the disease.

The plan of our redemption exhibited in the Gospel is not only much too exalted for the human mind to have devised, but, even when thus devised and exhibited to our view, is in many particulars far beyond the limit of the most enlarged understanding. Yet the more carefully we contemplate that plan, the more distinctly do we perceive it to have been formed, not only in mercy but in wisdom. If, then, such parts of it as we can either wholly or partially understand bear unquestionable marks of Infinite Wisdom, does it not follow, as a fair and legitimate conclusion, that those which exceed our comprehension must partake of the same character? When we acknowledge those parts which are perceptible to us, to be the result of the perfection of wisdom, upon what just ground can we pronounce those which we cannot comprehend, to be either less wise or less perfect?

Whenever, therefore, any mysterious doctrine is proposed to us as the subject of belief, our first duty evidently is, to ascertain that it is so proposed to us in Scripture, and, consequently, to receive it as the oracle of God ; our next, to inquire *how* it can be rendered most efficacious in promoting the great work of our salvation. With this view let us now proceed to the consideration of the important doctrine contained in the text. After briefly stating the Scripture evidence for the Personality of the Holy Spirit, I shall endeavour, first, to describe his Office in “ sealing us to the Day of Redemption,” and then point out to you the awful consequences incurred by “ grieving the Holy Spirit of God.”

Were it my present intention to enter into an argument upon the *Divinity* of the Holy Spirit, I might show by various passages, such as that in which “ lying unto the Holy Ghost is termed lying unto *God* *,” that it is distinctly and unequivocally asserted in Scripture. But since those who acknowledge his *Personality* generally admit also his *Divinity* as a necessary consequence, by giving proof of the former, the latter will be sufficiently established.

The error into which many have fallen with regard to his Personality arises from an improper interpretation of particular portions of Scripture, by substituting a part for the whole, and from such

* Acts, v. 3, 4.

partial premises deducing a general conclusion. In the passages alluded to, the Spirit of God is spoken of as being “given or as being poured out,” and thence it is inferred that the Holy Ghost is a mere quality, or energy, or emanation of the Divine Grace. But whatever countenance certain texts of Scripture may apparently give to such an opinion, with others it is found to be quite incompatible. Both in the institution of baptism and in the apostolical benediction, He is joined with the Father and the Son, in such a manner as clearly denotes his Personality. To say, “Go ye and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name *” of two persons and of a quality, is contrary both to the language of Scripture and of common sense. And the conjunction of these expressions, “the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of” † a particular *quality* or *operation* is equally incongruous and absurd.

But further, let us observe the peculiarly marked manner in which the Holy Spirit is distinguished from the two other persons of the Trinity by our blessed Saviour himself. “I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you for ever, even the Spirit of truth.” ‡ Now, if our Saviour was himself a Person, as is universally admitted, it is fair to infer that his successor, *another* Comforter, must be a Person also.

* Matt. xxviii. 19.

† 2 Cor. xiii. 14.

‡ John, xiv. 16, 17.

The same conclusive inference is drawn from such texts as these: "The Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things." * "When the Spirit of truth is come he will guide you into all truth; for he shall not speak of himself, but whatsoever he shall hear that shall he speak; for he shall receive of mine and show it unto you." † Now, in interpreting these expressions, it is impossible, without the grossest abuse of language, to confound the Holy Ghost either with the Father who sendeth Him, or with the Son in whose name He is sent, or to regard Him in any other light than as a distinct Person.

With this interpretation the language of the Apostles is in perfect accordance. St. Paul, for instance, states that "the Spirit maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered; that he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God" ‡— a form of expression which decidedly distinguishes him from the Father. And by the same Apostle, seeing, hearing, working in us, interceding for us, "dividing gifts to every man severally as he will"—such actions and operations, in short, are ascribed to Him, as involve the inevitable conclusion, that the Holy Ghost is a distinct Person of the blessed Trinity, in glory equal, in majesty co-eternal.

Let us proceed next to inquire, what is the office

* John, xiv. 26.

† John, xvi. 13.

‡ Rom. viii. 26, 27.

of the Spirit in sealing us to the day of redemption ; and to show that the benefits resulting from the exercise of that office are peculiarly adapted to the wants and weakness of our corrupt nature. With regard to the first of these subjects, we may remark that, at the fall, the whole race of Adam, from being sons of God, became “ children of wrath,” and consequently lost that inheritance to which they were originally entitled. They were thence subject to sin and death, and were “ led captive by Satan at his will.” Ever since that fatal period has man been more or less under their dominion, and is never quite exempted from it on this side the grave.

At the departure of the righteous from this world, the power of sin and Satan over their *souls* is forever abolished ; but death will still retain its authority over their *bodies* undiminished, until the day of the general resurrection. On that awful day shall the redeemed of the Lord be ransomed from the power of the grave, by “ that quickening Spirit which raised up Jesus from the dead,” “ and their vile bodies shall be changed, like unto his glorious body, by the working whereby he is able to subdue all things unto himself.” Then, and not till then, will they shake off the very last of those fetters that so long had held them in thralldom, awakening to light, to life, to liberty, and to the recovery of their forfeited inheritance by this public adoption into the family of heaven. By the day of their redemption then, we are to understand that day, on which they shall openly be proclaimed triumphant over the

united powers of Satan, sin, and death. It is unquestionably true that this redemption was effected by the death of Christ, and that the ransom was paid when he offered himself a sacrifice for the sins of mankind. But it appears equally true, from what hath been revealed to us in Scripture upon the subject, that the benefits of his purchase can only be rendered effectual by the application of the Holy Spirit; who thus ratifies the purchase and secures our salvation, by "sealing us to the day of redemption."

The *mode* in which the Holy Spirit effects this great object, we can only collect from the Scriptures. Of the miraculous powers, which he is there represented as bestowing on the Apostles, I shall not at present speak, but confine myself to those ordinary graces which we shall find equally indispensable to us, whether in a *converted* or *unconverted* state, and peculiarly adapted to the supply of all our spiritual wants.

To the unconverted sinner the Holy Spirit acts as an admonisher and reprover. In the days before the flood we find an unequivocal intimation of this nature, when the Lord 'said, "My Spirit shall not always strive with man*;" and when our Saviour foretells the coming of another Comforter, he declares that it will be "to reprove the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment."† This he accomplishes by the truths of his word and the opera-

* Gen. vi. 3.

† John, xvi. 8.

tions of his Providence ; by which he gives strength and force to the admonitions of conscience when we are sinking to rest in fatal security. When the temptations of the world, displayed before our eyes, are seducing us far from the paths of virtue, His is the warning voice that recalls us, saying, “ This is the way: walk ye in it.” After a long course of vicious conduct, when sudden calamity overwhelms the guilty, or when the angel of death seems summoning them to judgment, then is the power of the Searcher of hearts felt in all its terrors, reproving, convincing, exciting to contrition and amendment of life, if life be still allowed ; and when, with returning health, temptation regains its power, and corrupt nature is fast yielding to its sway, the same Spirit that inspired our good resolutions, recalls to our remembrance our former vows, confirming the work so happily begun, until it end in our complete reformation. Such is the case with the *unconverted* sinner.

Nor are the influences of the Holy Spirit, in suggesting, directing, protecting, strengthening, less requisite or beneficial to the *sincere Christian*. Even in the best of men there remains very much of weakness and corruption. St. Paul himself laments, that though he delights in the law of God after the inward man, “ there is another law in his members warring against the law of his mind, and bringing him into captivity to the law of sin *,” so that “ the

* Rom. vii. 19. and 23.

good that I would," saith he, "I do not; but the evil which I would not, that I do." This inward corruption, then, which upon every fresh temptation manifests itself in pride or intemperance, or discontent, or sloth, or worldliness, or some other evil habit or affection, is constantly striving to regain its ascendancy. Nor could it fail ultimately to succeed, unless the good principle within us received strength to resist. Such strength is afforded us by the gracious aid of the Holy Spirit, suggesting devout thoughts, prompting good resolutions, and enabling us to carry them into effect. It is only "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus that can make us free from the law of sin and death." *

It remains for me to mention still another mode in which the Holy Spirit helpeth our infirmities; and that is, by "bearing witness with our spirits that we are the children of God." † When we look back upon our past life, so many evil thoughts, words, and actions, all contrary to the divine law, rise to our view, that we are compelled to exclaim with the Psalmist, "Our sins are more in number than the hairs of our head, therefore our heart faileth us;" we are ready to sink into despair, and to abandon for ever all hope of working out our salvation.

Here then it is that the Comforter most seasonably interposes with his heavenly grace. He suggests to our mind the infinite mercy of God in Christ "whose blood cleanseth from all sin." He

* Rom. viii. 2.

† Rom. viii. 16.

encourages us with the promises and consolations of the Gospel; he seals the truth of the word preached; he gives complete efficacy to the holy sacraments, to the engagements contracted at our baptism, to the vows made at his holy table; and thus diffuses peace through our troubled spirits, by his sacred influences — the pledges of present pardon, the earnest of eternal happiness. As the Spirit of prayer, the Intercessor for the Saints, he fills us with true devotion, enables us to pour forth our hearts in fervent supplications, sometimes “with groanings that cannot be uttered;” but even those silent aspirations of unutterable anguish rise audible and acceptable before the throne on high. It is by inspiring such feelings, by ministering such assistance, and by enabling us to judge of the reality of that spiritual aid by its fruits and effects, that “he fills us with all joy and peace in believing.”

And here let me earnestly caution you against forming, from your feelings alone, any opinion, whether favourable or unfavourable, of your spiritual state. Between these aids of the Holy Spirit and the natural operations of our own mind, it is difficult, perhaps impossible, to distinguish with certainty. So silently doth the Spirit work through the medium of our own thoughts, subduing our wills, purifying our affections, and counteracting our natural corruption, that had not Scripture assured us of the fact, we should not, when practising holiness, have known ourselves to be actuated by a divine power. This *imperceptibleness* of the Spirit's influence upon

our mind is denoted in Scripture by “the wind blowing where it listeth:” we perceive and feel its effects, but know neither “whence it cometh nor whither it goeth.”* As the great Creator is seen only in his external works, so is the Author of grace in the heart invisible, but his work is manifest. Trust not, therefore, implicitly to internal feelings, which are often presumptuous and deceitful; rely not, as some have done, upon particular revelations which are fond and often fatal delusions; but, in judging of your spiritual condition, adopt this only certain and infallible rule recommended in Scripture: “Hereby know ye the Spirit of God, if ye love God and keep his commandments, and bring forth the fruits of the Spirit. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth *not* his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.”†

Before I conclude, allow me to direct your attention to the import of the phrase, “grieving the Holy Spirit of God,” and to the awful consequences to which those who are guilty of such offence are exposed. This is evidently a metaphorical expression, employed after the manner of men, to denote that, in pursuing a certain course of conduct forbidden by the Spirit of God, we act towards him in such a manner as would create grief and displeasure in our fellow-creatures; and then that he, in consequence, acts towards us as our fellow-creatures would act, when grieved and offended by us—

* John, iii. 8.

† 1 John, ii. 4.

withdrawing former kindness, and leaving us to ourselves.

In *what* that conduct so grievous to the Holy Spirit consists, may be gathered from the context. The apostle begins by recommending unity to the whole church of Corinth, and to its individual members perfect purity and renewal of mind. As the means of producing this unity, and as an evidence of this renewal of mind, he warns them diligently against committing sins injurious to society; earnestly inculcates truth, honesty, diligence, gentleness in cultivating a useful intercourse with each other, as well in temporal as in spiritual matters; and then emphatically adds, "Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, by which you are sealed unto the day of redemption."

The inference to be drawn is obvious and irresistible. It is clear, that if we introduce discord and division into the church of Christ, we destroy, as far as in us lies, the very *means* which God has appointed for bringing us to a knowledge of the truth. It is clear, that if our heart be not filled with love to God, it must become the prey of every evil passion. From this impure fountain will flow waters of bitterness, full of deadly poison, dangerous to others, destructive to ourselves. By the encouragement or permission of evil thoughts come evil actions. By the repetition of evil actions, habits are formed and confirmed, which not only deaden the power of conscience, but even quench and expel the Spirit. *One single evil habit*, rendered familiar to

the soul, is utterly inconsistent with the spirit of holiness. It is a fatal delusion to say that we are free from many sins to which other men are habituated. Few men are such monsters as to addict themselves to all. But if we have one favourite sin which we cherish or tolerate, all our pretensions to godliness are vain. For, in *habitually* yielding to that one sin, we are in principle violating the whole law; since we are solemnly assured in Scripture, that "whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, is guilty of all."* That sin, that favourite sin which so easily besets us, is the rival of God in our hearts, and stamps us as the children of disobedience, with whom he hath most solemnly declared that his "Spirit shall not always strive."

Let us not deceive ourselves with the vain hope that, without our hearty desire and strenuous endeavour, he will *compel* us to be virtuous. For the influence that he exerts is merely of an assistant, not of a compulsive nature, nor does it supersede the use of our own exertions. By our own voluntary act, through the aid of Divine grace, must our evil passions be sacrificed on the altar of religion: by our own determined resolutions must we steadily obey all good motions within us: by our own utmost efforts must we "walk after the Spirit," if we would be conducted by Him to the mansions of bliss.

* James, ii. 10. ¹²

But if, on the contrary, we harden our hearts, or remain inactive and disobedient, he will most certainly abandon us, a prey to our own lusts and to the dominion of our spiritual foes. From the moment that the Holy Spirit abandons us, we are in the jaws of ruin, though we know it not; we are slumbering on the brink of a precipice, and in hell shall we lift up our eyes. From the moment that he abandons us we are sealed, not to the day of redemption, but to the night of everlasting perdition. When the Son of man shall come in his glory, we shall indeed arise from the grave to meet him; but it will only be to receive from Him, as our judge, the punishment of our obstinate impenitence. For “if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, and been made partakers of the Holy Ghost, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sin, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation. For if he that despised Moses’ law died without mercy, of how much sorer punishment suppose ye shall *he* be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of Grace?” *

Since these things are so, let us resolve, through the aid of Divine grace, henceforth to promote to the utmost of our power the work of the Spirit in our souls. For this important purpose let us zealously follow the means which he hath appointed,

* Heb. x. 26. 29.

and hath promised to bless. Let it be our fixed determination, never to permit one single day to pass over our heads without reading and meditating upon the revealed will of God ; never, so long as we are blessed with health and opportunity, to suffer one Sabbath to glide away without our waiting upon the Lord in His holy temple ; never to turn our back with ingratitude or indifference upon the altar of our Saviour, but to draw near to it, upon this most solemn day *, that we may receive fresh supplies of grace and goodness, — praying always most fervently to the Father of mercies, that He may render these His ordinances effectual to our eternal salvation, and enable us to bring forth the fruits of the Spirit to the praise of His glory.

* Whitsunday.

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FINAL PREVALENCE OF CHRISTIAN UNITY.

JOHN, x. 16.

Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold : them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice ; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd.

THE careful investigator of revealed truth will not fail to be struck with many passages in the sacred canon, which point to a state of moral and religious perfection hitherto without example in the world ; when Christianity shall obtain its due influence over the opinions and conduct of mankind, and the fruit of "righteousness shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance." * Such predictions will furnish him with a reply to those sophists, who would depreciate our holy faith, by insidiously comparing the external result of its precepts with the greatness of its pretensions ; and profess their inability to conceive, that the Son of God would descend from heaven, to establish a religion apparently so feeble in its moral oper-

* Isaiah, xxxii. 17.

ations, and hitherto received by so inconsiderable a portion of those, whose present comfort and eternal salvation it was confessedly designed to promote.

It may indeed be justly urged, in reply to these suggestions, that the real advantages derived to man from the incarnation and sufferings of his Saviour would be very inadequately represented by a mere view of the outward circumstances of Christians. The ameliorating and sanctifying influence of our holy religion; its powers of restraint and encouragement; the comforts and the joys which it imparts; cannot be fully appreciated, but by tracing it in the privacy of domestic habits; in the character and conduct of those who are least known and regarded by the world; in the closet of the penitent, in the house of the mourner, or the chamber of the diseased. It may also be remarked, that no conclusive argument against the beneficial effects of Christianity can be drawn from the comparatively limited sphere of its acceptance among the nations of the earth. For it would not, perhaps, be difficult to show, that many parts, even of the heathen world, are now partakers in temporal benefits, which are the legitimate fruit of Christianity; and we are by no means justified in imagining, that those only to whom the Gospel has been preached will profit by the sacrifice of atonement made by him, who is, “the Saviour of all men*,” but in a

* 1 Tim. iv. 10.

more especial manner of those that believe. The wisdom* of God may have determined to render the

* The salvability of the heathen is discussed with much judgment and moderation by Plaifere, in a short appendix to his "Appeal to the Gospel for the true Doctrine of Divine Predestination." The subject is one in which every humane and charitable person will feel deeply interested; and such readers, even if they be not entirely satisfied with the author's reasonings, will at least (as the editors of the tracts observe) "wish them to be well grounded, if they be not."

The following observations, with which he opens his argument, are well fitted to incline the reader in its favour: — "If we make a research into what all religion is founded upon, it will appear principally the belief of the Divine goodness; without this, men could not think the Supreme Being to be of such condescension as to take notice of them and their actions; much less without a persuasion of it, would any be induced to credit his having revealed himself to them, or reconciled himself to us by the incarnation and sufferings of his Son. Whatsoever, therefore, weakens the belief of this, must lessen the reasonableness and credibility of religion. But that God should not only have given greater light, and better means of attaining blessedness, to the visible church, but also have wholly excluded the bulk of mankind, who never had opportunity of coming within the pale of it, from a possibility of salvation, seems no way reconcileable with it. For if to have raised out of the womb of faultless unoffending nothing infinite myriads of men, into a condition from which unthinking they should unavoidably drop into eternal unutterable sorrows, be consistent with goodness; contradictions may be true, and all rational deductions but a dream. It therefore seems necessary to conclude, from the benignity of the divine nature, that he would give, to all those whom his just severity had brought under the disadvantageous effects of their progenitors' disobedience, a possibility at least of avoiding the more miserable

cross of Christ available, though in a manner incomprehensible to us, to the salvation of those, who

consequences, and of bettering their condition." If the passages which the author brings forward from Scripture be not considered as sufficiently explicit to justify our full assent to his conclusions, they will at least prevent our determining peremptorily against them. It is not, however, to be imagined, nor would this author have encouraged such an idea, that, under any circumstances, the same degree of bliss can be attainable by the ignorant heathen, as by the faithful and obedient Christian. If the involuntary disobedience of the former will be less severely punished, we may suppose that his untutored obedience will be also less richly rewarded. And this consideration alone should urge us to impart the light of Christianity to all who sit in darkness; though, at the same time, we may cherish a hope, that as "they who have sinned without law shall be judged without the law;" so for them also, who have lived to the best of their power, according to the law of God written in the hearts of all men, a blessing is reserved. At the same time, they, who, dwelling among the heathen, have not even contributed, by the bright influence of a Christian example, to turn the hearts of the Gentiles to the obedience of the faith, will do well to consider the following remarks, with which the learned author closes his subject. They are perhaps applicable to too many of our countrymen, and may awaken them to a profitable, though a painful, sense of opportunities neglected, and duties omitted. "As to the too great part of the world, which, since the publication of the Gospel, hath not been Christian, their case is most hazardous, who have had opportunities of knowing the doctrine of Christ, but made no use of them, or have not believed it when preached to them. And the question about the salvability of particular persons in such circumstances cannot be resolved, without we had an exact knowledge of their neglect, or unbelief; but a general

have not been permitted to hear the glad tidings of his coming. And, without presuming to decide

answer is very obvious. A neglect in acquiring a knowledge of the Christian faith is faulty or excusable, according as men had or wanted motives to think it reasonable or necessary; and the blame of all unbelief is aggravated or extenuated proportionably, as the credibility of the teacher, or the arguments used by him, were more or less sufficient and fit to have convinced the hearers, if they had judged impartially. But perhaps it would not be difficult to give a moral demonstration, that a far greater proportion of them than nine parts out of ten have scarce heard of the Christian profession, or at most have but a very imperfect notion of it, and of the grounds on which it is founded. An huge part of mankind very long had, or still have, little or no intercourse with Christians; corruption and ignorance long overspread the face of religion, vile opinions prevailed, and wicked practices were indulged in the church; and some or all of them are still lamentably prevalent in a great part of her, which must needs divert many from embracing the faith; and give them strong prejudices against it: and consequently their infidelity is rather chargeable on Christians, so miserably recommending their religion. Again, at this day Christian princes and states are deplorably wanting in taking proper measures for the instruction, even of their own vassals and subjects; and Christians of all ranks, not only express no concern for the conversion of neighbouring heathen, but render their religion odious to them by their cruelty, avarice, lust, or perfidiousness. And where such attempts have been made for propagating our religion, it hath frequently been by such, who having departed from the simplicity and purity of the Gospel, have confounded it with fables, and debased it with the alloys of error and superstition. All which considered, the heathen who are nearest to, and have most conversation with us, may be looked upon by God,

upon a subject not clearly revealed, our confidence in that justice and mercy inseparable from the divine nature should prevent us from forming any conclusions, which may even seem to derogate from the perfection of these attributes.

Still, however, it may be allowed, that, if we limit our consideration to the visible effects of our holy faith, neither the records of history, nor the testimony of actual experience, can warrant our belief, that the reign of the Messias has yet been attended by all its predicted temporal blessings ; and we are irresistibly impelled to conclude, that a far more widely extended reception of his Gospel, a far more beneficial operation of his commandments, is to be expected. The encouragement, which appears to be given by the language of Holy Writ to this expectation, has, indeed, been often abused. Of the theories which have been built upon it, some have been in the highest degree extravagant and mischievous *, giving the reins to every inordinate

as under equal disadvantages with those, who never heard the name of Christ. And though there be an heavy guilt in their infidelity, it must devolve from the infidel on the Christian.” — *Plaifere's Appeal to the Gospel, &c.* — *Collection of Tracts.* Cambridge, 1719.

* Of these may be mentioned particularly the Fifth Monarchy Men ; — “ a set,” says Mosheim, “ of wrong-headed and turbulent enthusiasts, who expected Christ's sudden appearance upon earth, to establish a new kingdom ; and, acting in consequence of this illusion, aimed at the subversion of all human government, and were for turning all things into the most

propensity of the human heart, and sapping the foundations of all established authority, whether civil or religious; while others, though less injurious in their tendency, have partaken more of visionary speculation than was consistent with the sober interpretation of revealed truth. But without dwelling upon the sinful absurdities which have rendered the former class abominable in the view of every pious and intelligent Christian, or further particularising the opinions of good and learned, though fanciful writers, who have perhaps awakened a prejudice in the minds of some, even against the truth itself, which their exaggerations have disfigured; it is an historical fact, that in every age of the church a belief has prevailed, that a time of greater doctrinal and moral perfection was approaching; in which Christianity should shine forth with a lustre as yet unknown, and its professors should be perfectly united in faith and affection.

To such a period the language of our Saviour in the text appears to direct our attention: "Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also

deplorable confusion." — *Mosheim's Eccles. Hist.* cent. 17. sect. 2. part 2. chap. 2. s. 22. The tumults and commotions which were excited by the Anabaptists in Germany, A. D. 1521, under their leaders Munzer and his associates, may be traced, in great measure, to the same delusion. "They declared war against all laws, governments, and magistrates of every kind, under the chimerical pretext, that Christ was now to take the reins of civil and ecclesiastical government into his own hands." — *Mosheim*, cent. 16. s. 3. part 2. chap. 3. s. 4.

must I bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd." May we not be allowed to paraphrase this passage thus? I have disciples whom ye yet know not: they belong, not indeed to the Jewish Church or nation, but their hearts are prepared for my doctrine; and when they are called by the ministry of my apostles and their successors, they also shall hear my voice, "receiving the word" with gladness and "readiness of mind*," and submitting themselves, in all sincerity of faithful obedience, to my directions. "Them also must I bring;" they shall be added† to my church: and when this great work is completed, and these Gentiles are wholly brought in, then shall the influence of my Gospel be fully manifested in the harmony of its professors; and all being perfectly joined together in the profession of the same faith, and in obedience to the same form of external polity, there shall be henceforth but "one fold," as there is but "one shepherd."

Viewing, then, the text in this light, to what period in the annals of Christianity shall we look for its

* Acts, xvii. 11.

† The expression in the original, *κακεῖνα μὲ δεῖ ἀγαγεῖν*, is not rendered by our translators with its full force, by, "them also must I BRING." This is one of those passages in which the simple verb is used with the force of the compound, "*κακεῖνα μὲ δεῖ ἀγαγεῖν*, hoc est, *συναγαγεῖν*, congregare, uti Theophyl. interpretatur, quam explicationem juvat, quod cap. xi. 52. dicitur: vel *προσαγαγεῖν*, adducere, nimirum ad ecclesiæ ovile."—*Glassii Philol. Sac. lib. iii. tract 3. can. 1.*

accomplishment? We know that when the “blindness*” which had “happened in part to Israel,” and had closed the minds of God’s once chosen people against the doctrine of salvation, obliged the Apostles to “turn to the Gentiles†;” they traversed every region of the then civilised world, proclaiming the glad tidings of the Gospel; making converts, founding churches, and thus extending the spiritual dominion of the great Shepherd and Bishop of souls. We know, also, how rapid was the growth of that seed which they planted; that, even under the most discouraging circumstances, it flourished and spread; until, like the grain of mustard in the parable‡, it became a great tree, and nations reposed under its shadow. Still, however, this influence, so soon obtained, so widely extended, though wonderful in itself, and strongly attesting the overruling providence of him who giveth the hearing ear and the understanding heart, fills not up the idea which the language of the text suggests. For though other sheep were brought in, and the “redeemed of the Lord were gathered out of all lands, from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south§;” though all agreed in acknowledging one common shepherd, even Jesus Christ, in whose name they had believed; yet when can it be said that the fold has been one? Can we trace the unity which such a declaration would induce us to

* Romans, xi. 25.

† Acts, xiii. 46.

‡ Matthew, xiii. 32.

§ Psalm, cvii. 2, 3.

expect in the contests of the first Christians, when the Jewish convert was arrayed against his Gentile brother ; — the one, insisting upon the burdensome ceremonies of his own abrogated ritual ; the other, not only rejecting these “ beggarly elements *,” as they were styled by St. Paul, but uncharitably despising those, by whose inherited prejudices they were upheld ?

Or shall we seek this unity in any particular church, which the apostles founded ? “ Envy, strife, and divisions † ” banished it from Corinth. Of the Galatians, many, even under the great Apostle’s inspection, were ready to “ bite and devour one another.” ‡ To the Ephesians, he was obliged strongly to urge the duty of “ keeping the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace § ;” and his monitory exhortations to the Philippians || and Colossians ¶, as well as the anxiety which he expressed for the spiritual confirmation of the Thessalonians **, all tend to prove, that the sons of confusion had already commenced their disorganising labours.

As we descend, the prospect darkens before us ; and the last testimony borne by the sacred records to the state of Christianity, prepares us but too well for the discord, which marks the later periods of ecclesiastical history. Of the seven churches †† addressed in the Apocalypse, two only are exempted

* Galatians, iv. 9. † 1 Cor. iii. 3. ‡ Gal. v. 15.
 § Eph. iv. 3. || Phil. iii. 2. ¶ Col. ii. 4. et seq.
 ** 1 Thess. iii. †† Apoc. ii. iii.

from the censure of having in some degree departed from the purity and unity of the faith. Heresies had deformed the doctrine, and idolatries polluted the worship, of the remaining five.

From that period to the present, where shall we discover such an uniform adoption of the same doctrine, such mutual eharity, such tranquil submission to one system of discipline, as seem requisite to the full accomplishment of our Saviour's prediction? Many indeed have been the temporal benefits conferred upon the world by Christianity; and however the vices or the passions of mankind may have counteracted its influence, these benefits are still perceptible wherever its knowledge has been extended. But its full effect has, perhaps, never yet been witnessed; and while it continues to be in itself a source of bitterness and envy, of contests and divisions; while its professors are separated from each other, by almost every possible modification of belief, and agree in little else besides a nominal acknowledgment of one common Saviour; we must either be induced by past experience to conclude, that real Christian unity is a blessing, which man in this present life is incapable of enjoying; or we must look forward in hope to some appointed time, when he, who knows how to bring order out of confusion, shall say unto these unruly waves, "Peace, be still*;" and the tempest of conflicting opinions shall subside into a calm at his command.

* Mark, iv. 39.

It will be the object of the present discourse,

I. First, to lay some ground of scriptural authority, on which the latter opinion may be supported.

II. Secondly, to consider the duties which devolve on those who cherish such an expectation.

I. The different prophecies which have been supposed by learned interpreters to bear upon this subject, if separately considered, would lead to an investigation, on which the limits of this discourse do not allow me to enter. It may be sufficient to bring forward one remarkable prediction of Isaiah ; which, after all due allowance is made for the bold and figurative language of the Prophet, will still be found so wholly inapplicable to any known state of society, that we are, in a manner, compelled to look forward to ages yet to come for its accomplishment. And, thus viewed, it will appear to justify the hope, which has been so generally and so fondly cherished, that the prayer of our Saviour shall finally prevail ; that his disciples shall be all one ; and the divinity of his mission shall be manifested to the world, not only by the excellence of his doctrine, or the testimony of those who were witnesses of his miracles, but by its effect upon the hearts and conversation of his followers, by their perfect unity and mutual affection.

In the eleventh chapter of his prophecy, after describing the qualifications, the conduct, and the character of the Messiah, the inspired writer thus represents the effect of that religion which this mysterious personage was to promulgate. “ The

wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf, and the young lion, and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together: and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice' den." These highly poetical expressions have received the same interpretation from every Christian commentator. To all they have appeared to describe the final influence of that religion of purity and love, which was to reform the evil, and civilise the ferocious; that religion, by whose sanctifying power, sin, the great cause of human misery, was to be vanquished; and those turbulent passions of the natural man, from whence come "variance, emulations, and wrath *," as well as "seditions and heresies," were to be brought under subjection to the commandments of the God of peace. If this religion has not yet brought forth such fruits; if it has hitherto proved a cause of contention, rather than the harbinger of unanimity; shall we therefore doubt its efficacy? Or shall we presume to suppose that God is "slack concerning his promise †," because all things yet continue in their former state of disunion? Rather let us believe, that the promise itself is suspended upon conditions as yet unfulfilled: let us be convinced, that Christianity has

* Galatians, v. 20.

† 2 Peter, iii. 9

not yet worked “peace on earth *,” only because its precepts are not yet fully known, its sanctions are not yet universally acknowledged.

The prophet himself seems to encourage us in looking forward to a future day ; when, dropping in part the language of metaphor, he proceeds to say, “ They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain : for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.” † When then the truths of our holy religion shall have been thus diffused and accepted ; when the stony hearts of the hitherto untutored barbarians shall have been softened, and from them God shall have raised up “ children unto Abraham ‡,” as he has already done from us ; when the words of the Psalmist shall have been fulfilled, and the Son shall have received “ the heathen for his inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession § ;” when “ all nations shall flow unto the mountain of the Lord’s house || ;” when they who have not yet heard the name of Christ shall “ kneel before him ¶ ;” and they who now imperfectly and ignorantly worship him shall become truly his disciples ; then shall *that* come to pass which is written in the prophecy of Zephaniah, “ God shall turn unto the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the Lord, to serve him with one consent.” ** The days of injury and de-

* Luke, ii. 14.

† Isa. xi. 9.

‡ Matt. iii. 9.

§ Psalm, ii. 8.

|| Micah, iv. 1.

¶ Psalm, lxxii. 9.

** Zeph. iii. 9.

struction, of strife and contention, shall have an end. The churches shall find rest as at the first; and “walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, they shall be multiplied.” *

How or when this great event shall take place, we have not been informed: but it is worthy of remark, that concord and unity are ever represented in the Scriptures as the attendants of Christian knowledge; the knowledge, not of the head only, but of the heart; that true practical wisdom, which has been emphatically termed “the fear of the Lord.” † When the love of this knowledge fully prevails; when men shall have learned to “lay aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envyings, and all evil speakings, and to desire the sincere milk of the word that they may grow thereby ‡;” then shall religion have her perfect work; the fruit of righteousness shall flourish and abound; and the “peace of God shall keep the hearts and minds of all his worshippers through Christ Jesus.” §

Then may the saying of our Saviour in the text be fulfilled. And as all agree in obedience to “one shepherd,” so may all be united in one common fold, that apostolic Church, within whose pale the faith, which its inspired founders taught, has been preserved; the sacraments, which they delivered as of divine institution, have been duly administered;

* Acts, ix. 31.

† 1 Pet. ii. 1.

† Prov. i. 7.

§ Phil. iv. 7.

and the form of government, which they appointed, has ever been maintained.

Thus will the disciples of Jesus Christ be one, even as he is one with his Father : one, not in outward seeming, but in inward verity ; one, not by fortuitous collection in the same place ; not by the mere nominal distinction of their common calling ; not by a temporary association for some secondary purpose ; not by a compromise of irreconcilable differences, or a covenanted indifference to all which had hitherto divided them ; but one in faith, in loyalty, in holiness, in charity. They shall “ love as brethren *,” because as brethren they have learned to reverence the same God and Father of all, to live as members of one spiritual family, and to conform in sincerity to its institutions ; because, in one word, they have been taught to submit their understanding to the instruction, and their will to the commandments of him, whom they call their Master, even Jesus Christ, their Redeemer and their God.

II. Having thus shown that our expectation of this event is founded upon scriptural authority, I am next to enquire, what are the duties which Christians, animated by such hopes, may be called upon to perform.

We know that they who seek for blessings from the hand of God are not only required to pray with entire confidence in his power and goodness, but

* 1 Peter, iii. 8.

also diligently to use every lawful method of procuring for themselves the object of their petitions.* “The husbandman that laboureth is partaker of the fruits.”† And though, to attribute our success in any pursuit entirely to our own prudent and skilful employment of secondary means, without any regard to that overruling Providence, whose blessing alone can render human skill or prudence available to its object, would savour of impious presumption; on the other hand, to believe that God will hear the prayer of the slothful, or that he will assist us when we endeavour not to help ourselves, is the part of folly or fanaticism. If then it is allowed us to pray for the peace of our Jerusalem, doubtless we may also lawfully endeavour to promote its establishment; and while we look forward with eager longing to the time when all Christians shall be united, not only “in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth‡,” it certainly becomes us to put away from us all which can occasion divisions, and to cul-

* “If we would obtain any thing at God’s hand, we must not only ask it, but seek for it. He that having prayed, sits still, without adding his endeavour, shall not receive the thing he prayeth for: for he must not onely *orare*, but *laborare*; *pro quibus enim orandum, pro iis laborandum est*: to this end the Apostle would have us to *pull up our faint hands and weak knees*; Heb. xii. And where we have asked grace, we must be carefull that we ourselves be not wanting unto grace, as well as we were carefull that grace should not be wanting unto us.” *Bp. Andrews on Prayer, Sermon. III.*

κ † 2 Tim. ii. 6.

‡ 1 John, iii. 18.

tivate, by every due method, that unity which we desire.

The well-instructed and consistent friend of Christian peace will however be careful, that his zeal to promote it injures not the cause which he desires to serve. He will therefore patiently wait for the accomplishment of those promises, from whence his hopes derive their origin; and he will diligently employ himself in the defence of the truth, knowing that real unity can be built upon no other foundation.

The failure of every previous attempt to accelerate the approach of that blessed period to which we are allowed to look forward, will sufficiently teach such a man the duty of patience. In the miseries which have been already produced by these hasty and intemperate projects, he will perceive the evil of disregarding the means and looking only to the end; and he will learn the folly and the guilt of sacrificing the blessings which we possess, for untried and speculative advantages. He will not think so meanly of divine Providence, as to believe, that its purposes can only be accomplished by the irregular exertions of man's unrighteous zeal; nor will he suppose that God, who has given us a law by which our conduct is to be guided, will be pleased with those who deviate from it, under the vain pretence of rendering him services which he has never required. Of this he will be assured, that whatsoever cannot be attained by steady adherence to known duty, it is neither safe nor right to pursue;

and that they who quit the sphere in which they have been placed, or neglect the work which it was their bounden duty to perform, that they may employ themselves in unbidden labours, will aggravate every sin of omission with which they may be chargeable, by their presumptuous intrusion into an office, which they were neither enabled nor appointed to undertake.

Such conduct is alike inconsistent with the faith and the humility which ought to adorn the Christian character. God, in his good providence, has appointed a set time for the accomplishment of his purposes ; and that time man can neither hasten by his impatience, nor retard by his opposition. Well convinced therefore of this, “ he that believeth shall not make haste * ;” it will be sufficient for him to know, that peace shall hereafter “ flourish out of the earth †,” and brethren in profession shall be united as brethren in love. This will be his consolation, when he contemplates the disorder and confusion which now obscure the brightness of religion ; and though his soul may be vexed within him, at the perverseness and folly of those who distract the Christian world by causeless separation and unnecessary disputations ; though his spirit may vent itself in earnest prayer to God, that he would be pleased shortly to establish that harmony which he has taught him to desire ; yet, relying upon the wisdom of his heavenly Master, and confident that

* Isaiah, xxviii. 16.

† Psalm, lxxxv. 11.

what he has promised shall be performed in its season, “ though it tarry, he will wait for it *,” though it be withheld, he will neither murmur nor despair. And as faith would thus check the murmurs of impatience ; so would humility, if properly cherished, prevent the intemperate exertions which so often counteract their own object.

For they who are deeply conscious of their own inability properly to discharge those obvious duties, which are of continual obligation, will not voluntarily enlarge the sphere of their labours, by engaging in the conduct of those plausible, but often dangerous experiments, which the seducer or the visionary are ever ready to propose to men of unwary benevolence.

It is indeed too much the disposition of the present age, to neglect the plain and unostentatious employments of private duty, and to exhaust its powers in vain attempts to reduce to practice the splendid theories of speculative philanthropists. The ardent and enthusiastic gaze on the paintings of their own imagination, until they mistake them for realities ; and, intoxicated with an ambition to make themselves a name among the benefactors of mankind, they too often overstep the limits, to which a more lowly opinion of their own talents would confine them ; they attempt to be wise above what is written, to fathom the counsels of almighty wisdom, and to determine for themselves the proper

* Habakkuk, ii. 3.

time, and the most effectual method, of promoting the cause of religion.

The meek and humble Christian will rather labour to do that will of God, which he knows to be revealed; and will believe, that all which cannot be obtained by persevering in the straight path of his commandments, we are neither required to seek, nor empowered to secure.

The peacemaker is not however confined to a state of mere passive quiescence, but has many active duties to discharge. It remains with him to look well to that foundation of Christian doctrine, on which alone the peace of Christians can be securely built; and here the energies of the most resolute and indefatigable mind may find ample employment. Even if an union could be attained by a surrender of truth, the most ardent admirer of this blessing would hesitate, before he thus consented to exchange the greater for the lesser good: but if the really conscientious have ever felt it difficult to determine, when such an alternative was proposed to them, the doubts by which they have been harassed may now give way to the conviction, that all such concessions would be fruitless. The experiment has been tried at various times, by different projectors; and their anxiety to succeed has rendered them, as we have already seen, profuse even to prodigality in their offers. Neither the purity of our holy faith, nor the constitution of the church, nor the due administration of the sacraments, has been considered as too precious to be

bartered for a cessation of religious contests. But all have been hazarded in vain: truth has been depreciated, the authority of the church weakened and degraded, the worship of God itself debased, and his ordinances profaned, neglected, or despised; but still Christians have continued strangers to peace, and the spirit of discord and animosity has retained its dominion. What wise or good man then will longer persevere in so hopeless, so injurious an undertaking? The dictates of a sound discretion and a well-regulated sense of duty, will teach such a person rather to devote his time and his faculties to the preservation of that sound doctrine which is committed to his trust, than to waste his strength in vain attempts* to promote an

* The vanity of all such attempts cannot be more clearly shown, than by a fair statement of what the church must concede, if she would remove every occasion of offence which different classes of dissenters have taken against her. It will thus appear, that she may unchurch herself; but that such a suicidal weakness could not tend to unite those, who, after all she could surrender, would still have subjects for interminable dispute among themselves. Each of the principal sects, into which protestant dissenters are divided, differs at least as much from the rest, as they all do from the church. And her compliance with the scruples of one class would but remove her farther from reconciliation with the others than she now is, while firmly adhering to her own doctrine, discipline, and worship. The impossibility of any plan of comprehension has been forcibly and truly represented upon this ground, by the author to whose examination of Bp. Burnet's Exposition of the Articles I have already had occasion to refer.

“Whereas,” says he, “we have dissenters of several sorts;

imaginary concord, which both reason and experience prove to be unattainable.

and they could never yet agree (nor is it likely they ever should agree) upon what terms or alterations, to be made in our forms of government and worship, they would all come in. To endeavour to please one, and displease another, is only a sure way of bringing all things into confusion, and can never consist with the Apostle's rule of having *all things done decently and in order*.

“ Before we can come to the union desired, we must disclaim the very essentials of a church ; which consist in a power from Christ and his Apostles to preach the Gospel, and administer the sacraments, and give rules and directions for the carrying on the service of God ; and leave every one to pray as he pleases, and worship as he pleases, and hear whom he pleases, and believe what he pleases ; and thus break all the bonds of union and communion, with a prospect of uniting with we know not who. This is in effect to unchurch ourselves, with the hopes of having a few more than now we have, to join with us in the offices of religion, which is the best term it will bear, for communion it cannot be called.

“ To be able to join with our protestant dissenters, (taking only five or six of the chief sects amongst them,) before we can do it, we must lay aside several of our articles ; we must cancel our canons, renounce our orders, or declare them needless, if not superstitious and popish : we must throw away our Common Prayer Book ; quite alter the constitution of the government, so far as concerns the lords spiritual : we must perfectly new-mould both church and state : we must, to please the Anabaptists, be all baptised again ; and to please the Quakers, renounce water baptism, and the use of all outward sacraments : we must deny the divinity of Christ, and never give glory to any but the Father, if we hope for peace with the Socinian. These, and many other, are the terms we must come

It has been already remarked, and the attentive reader of the Scriptures will not fail to observe, that,

up to, if we have any thoughts of a general union, and would not have it any longer said, that we differ with them in things of *less importance, or about things indifferent*.

“ But now, on the other hand, since it is impossible for the church to come up to such terms as will please all dissenters, thereby to put an end to our differences, till they are all agreed among themselves (which it is morally impossible to suppose they ever should be), it is evident that the blame of separation wholly lies at the door of the dissenters ; it is to them, and not to the church, we owe our divisions. There is not any thing of moment they can object to us. But if there be such a thing as heresie or schism ; if there be such a thing as a church, or a church-government ; if there be an obligation to decency and order in religion ; if all are not upon the level, but there is in Scripture such a thing as being *subject one to another*, and something of government there must be both in church and state ; then that which the Church of England hath to say, for her not being able to comply with her several adversaries, is this ; that it is impossible to please them all, especially considering, that what they insist upon and oppose, are things so very material, as to be of the very essence of a church ; and at the same time, what we have to object against them is, that for the most part they separate themselves from us, upon pretence of a few ceremonies only, which they themselves cannot but acknowledge to be *of their own nature indifferent* ; they may come into us, by the help of a very small degree of Christian submission and compliance ; but for the church to pretend to go in to all that dissent from her, cannot end in any thing less than an entire ceasing to be a church.

“ This being the true state of the case between the Church of England and our dissenters, with respect to the differences of religion between them and us, it plainly follows, that, though

in many instances, the peace which they promise is made to depend upon the prevalence of religious

a toleration be very practicable, and is no more than what is now granted by law, yet a comprehension is impracticable.”—*Prefatory Discourse*, &c. p. 100.

It will be difficult to prove, either that the statements of this sound and forcible writer were exaggerated, or that any material alteration has since taken place, which may render a renewal of such attempts expedient at the present moment, or furnish a rational expectation of their success. It is then to be hoped, that they who wish to lay a solid foundation for unity, will be content to build on the platform of the Church; and that all who ardently long for the revival of true charity, will range themselves under her banners, and support her mild and legitimate supremacy. To such persons, the following observations of Puller may furnish matter for profitable reflection. “As for others among us, who sometime have appeared weary of their contests; however unsettled, hovering, as it were, in some motions for union, and frequently are toiling themselves in tedious contemplations of new plots and schemes of government; framing to themselves ideas, not very Platonical, for peace and settlement; I conceive a seasonable conviction among such of the real moderation of our church, might save some of them grievous labours for the future; for how deficient they generally have been, they themselves have showed: and if our church is very moderate already, I need not say they have been very superfluous. There are indeed those, who are still requiring that the Protestant profession among us be settled in a due latitude; whereas we sincerely think the very thing desired is already the true temperament of our church; and such also as in no sort encourageth any indifferency or neutrality in religion, nor offers any such principles to her sons, as allows them, Proteus or Vertumnus like, to be susceptible of divers shapes and forms in religion; as our adversaries, who

knowledge. "All thy children," says the Prophet Isaiah *, "shall be taught of the Lord, and great shall be the peace of thy children." "God," says Jeremiah †, "shall reveal unto his people abundance of peace and truth." St. Paul gives us no reason to expect, that Christians will live in harmony, until the love of truth has subdued their prejudices and their obstinacy, and they have learned "with one mind and one mouth to glorify God." ‡ Then he encourages them to hope, that He, whom they thus unite in adoring, will "fill them with joy and peace in believing."

The lover of that tranquillity which real unity will produce, may thus learn how it is to be sought. If indeed he can be satisfied with momentary quiet and seeming reconciliation, such objects are attainable by other means; indifference may provide the one, and hypocritical compromises the other: but they who expect any real blessings to result from such sources; they who trust to "good words and fair speeches §," when war is in the hearts of those who utter them; have raised the fabric of their ex-

do not understand our Church, do suspect: whereas the more any are fixed, according to the right principles of our Church; the truer and firmer Protestants such are, we shall manifestly prove: and the more any are such, the more truly moderate they are, and their designs for peace must needs be the most discreet of any, and the more to purpose."—*Puller's Moderation of the Church of England.* Preface.

* Isaiah, liv. 13.

† Jer. xxxiii. 6.

‡ Rom. xv. 6. 13.

§ Romans, xvi. 18.

pectations on the sand, which the first storm that visits it will sweep away. He, therefore, who aspires to the character of a wise builder, will lay his foundation in that faith once delivered to the saints; not doubting that if this be well secured, God will cause peace to rest upon it; and under his protecting providence, those Christians who maintain it shall be “*builded together* for an habitation of God through the Spirit.”*

It is our peculiar blessing to have been educated in a Church, where the doctrine which flowed from the mouth of our Saviour, and was explained and recorded by his Apostles, still continues to be preached. Her confessions, her liturgy, her hierarchy, all have been tried in the fire, and all have stood the test with undiminished brightness. In this Church then, if any where in the world, the purity of apostolic truth and order yet remains. This is not, I trust, the language of vain confidence, but of sober conviction: it speaks an opinion, not founded merely upon the eulogies of her friends, but on the acknowledgments of many who are independent of her authority, and wholly unconnected with her by local situation. It affirms no more than her most inveterate enemies, even in the rage and fury of their controversial warfare, have been unable to disprove. Some of these, while they disturbed her peace, never ventured to impute to her fundamental errors in doctrine nor sinfu

* Ephesians, ii. 22.

terms of communion; while they hazarded her very existence, for the sake of a speculative purity, some even bore testimony against the sin of dividing from her; and allowed that the points in which they urged improvement, were such as neither affected her title to be reckoned a true and sound Church of Christ, nor, if they were retained, would justify separation. Nurtured then in such a Church, called, as many of us already are, and as many more will be, by profession, to teach and defend her doctrines; and bound as we all are, even by the laws of self-preservation, to uphold that society, of which we form a part; shall we hesitate to determine how we are to seek for peace; or can we find a surer road to it, than by maintaining that truth, of which the Church of England is the bulwark? We may indeed earnestly endeavour to remove the prejudices and conciliate the affections of those, who now are leagued against her; but if to accomplish this be beyond our power, what remains, but to preserve concord within her walls? to look well to her defences, that no adversary overpass them in the guise of friendship, and sow dissension even in her palaces and in her streets? From external attacks she has, comparatively, little to apprehend; but if the time should come, when her own internal harmony is disturbed*; when differences arise among

* In a visitation sermon on Philippians, i. 15., preached before Bishop Seth Ward, A. D. 1683, by John Barrow, the following pertinent observations are addressed to the clergy, on the necessity of arming the Church against external opposition

her defenders; and the faith, which she is called upon to preserve, is evil spoken of, and corrupted

by the preservation of internal concord. "Hence I infer the vast obligation under which we all are, to avoid *contention* one with another. For, why should we, who have had both the honour and the blessing of the same episcopal imposition of hands, have the same great concern of souls to advance, and do it by preaching the same gospel of peace, why, of all men, should we have variance with each other? It is too much occasion of contest our enemies give us; and with them it is a *noble contention*, because it is a *contending* for the *truth*. But if to the breaches they make upon us, we will open more of our own accord, and divide that force with which we should oppose them, they may in all probability succeed, but it will be little credit either to our *courage* or to our *integrity*. In two words, could so monstrous a thing be supposed, as that any of our own body could fly in the face of their lawful superiors, betray the peace and settlement of the Church of which they are members, and *preach* or *act* out of *envy* and *strife*; the mildest thing to be said of them is, that the greatest kindness they can show to our Church, next to that of public retractation and amendment, would be *publicly* to renounce it. For the same reason that it would be better for the *obstinate* and *scandalous* to renounce their baptism, than under the *pretence* of it to fall into such practices, as cause the name of Christ to be blasphemed." p. 30.

A deep conviction of their danger, who thus abuse their station in the ministry to the purposes of faction and division, and of the temptations too often suggested to the human heart, by the proud consciousness of superior intellectual endowments, induced the learned Hickes passionately to exclaim; "I would not be an heretick or schismatick in the Church, to have the wisdom of Solomon, the tongues of St. Paul, and the eloquence of Apollos; no, not to be caught up into Paradise, and hear those unutterable things. I would not be the best preacher

by her own children; then will the pillars of truth be undermined, and the sanctuary of peace will be

that ever was, and speak in the pulpit by inspiration, to have that accusation lye against me, which St. Paul drew up against the Corinthians, of envy, strife, and schism. The good angel, which keeps the door of heaven, would not exchange his humility, nor lose the rectitude of his will, to have the knowledge of the most enlightened of the seraphin, or of the archangels, which stands before the throne of God: for knowledge, and wit, and other intellectual excellencies, though they make a difference between a learned man and an idiot, and between one of the seven spirits, called the seven eyes of God, and a vulgar angel; yet they can make no difference betwixt a man or an angel from the devil, who can speak with the tongues of men and angels, who knows as much as any archangel, and much more than any man." In the same spirit he declares, in a subsequent part of this discourse; "It is better to be humble, than to be a prophet; it is better to be righteous, than to have the faith of miracles; and it is better to be holy, than to have the gift of tongues. But to be peaceable, and love union, is as great a grace, as to be humble, righteous, and holy; nay, as to be pure and temperate: for — it is equalled with all those, and many other of the prime graces in the New Testament, it is reckoned with many of them among the fruits of the Spirit; and the *fruits* of the Spirit are better and more desirable than the gifts thereof." — *Hickes's Posthumous Discourses*, Sermon VII. It is fervently to be wished that such may ever be the settled conviction of those, who are called to minister in the Church of England: that they may seek for peace in the spirit of peace; and that their labours to restore Christian unity may be directed by a true knowledge of its essentials; and a firm persuasion that any temporary association, founded upon their surrender, however specious may be its object, or alluring its pretensions, will only increase the disorders which it aims at

brought to desolation. Happy indeed would it be for the whole Christian world, if all who profess the common faith could love as brethren : and what, it may be asked, can be devised, more likely to promote an object so universally desired, than the example of one Church at least, “built as a city which is at unity in itself*?” or how can we contribute to raise such an edifice more securely, than by adhering, with the steadiness and sincerity of conviction, to the faith, the worship, and the discipline, which we have solemnly bound ourselves to support?

Strong then and urgent does the appeal become to those who love unity, that they uphold it in that family of God, to which they particularly belong, and for whose interests it is their greatest duty to provide. If they first seek the things which make for the peace of their own Church, and contribute to the edification of her members ; then will they not only have fulfilled their own appointed office, but, by so doing, will have provided, in the only effectual method in their power, for the union of the Christian world. How much more wisely, how much more profitably, will they be thus employed, than in attempting to ascertain what sacrifice of truth will be sufficient to conciliate the enemies of

removing ; and finally terminate in the downfall of the Church, and the irremediable corruption of that pure and apostolic faith, of which it is the legitimate depositary.

* Psalm, cxxii. 3.

peace ; and how far the common faith must be deprived of its characteristic doctrines, in order to lower it to that standard, to which all opinions may safely be referred ! Long enough has the world been deluded by such efforts ; long enough has the holy cause of our religion suffered from the wantonness of such projectors ! Happy will it be for the Church of England, and for mankind in general, if her members are at length persuaded to set a different example ; if, steadily maintaining that doctrine, against which scepticism itself has never yet been able to allege a plausible objection ; if, scrupulously conforming to that mode of worship, which has established its excellence, even on the futile cavils of its most strenuous opponents ; if, reverencing and obeying that apostolic form of church discipline, which has been the nurse of confessors and martyrs, and the uncorrupted guardian of the word and sacraments ; they “ stand fast in the Lord *,” and are “ at peace among themselves.” †

Then might we hope, that, wearied with their own unprofitable contests, they who have separated from the Church would at length be persuaded to return to the place of their rest, and seek in her sanctuary that godly quietness, that “ consolation in Christ,” that “ comfort of love,” that “ fellowship of the Spirit ‡,” which can never be found, where a perpetual struggle for the pre-eminence agitates the councils of self-appointed teachers, and an in-

* Phil. iv. 1.

† 1 Thess. v. 13.

‡ Phil. ii. 1.

satiabile desire of speculative improvement urges the giddy and inconstant multitude to perpetual innovation.

Every faithful member of the Church of England will earnestly pray, that such may be the blessed effect of her perseverance. It is thus that he will wish to see her triumph; to this supremacy he will desire that she may be exalted. The ways of violence and compulsion he will abhor; and however he may lament the errors of those who have wandered from her fold, by argument and persuasion alone will he desire to reclaim them; he will use no influence but that of truth; he will seek for no proselytes, but those who return upon conviction. The language of prophecy will encourage him to look forward to a day, when “all shall know the Lord from the least to the greatest*,” and well assured that this knowledge will *unite* those whom it *enlightens*, he will conceive, that the welfare of the Church will be best secured, and her influence best extended, by maintaining the purity of her constitution and her doctrine; humbly trusting, that, if she thus “holds fast what she already has, until the Lord come†,” she may be made the instrument in his hand, of “lifting up the ensign‡” of his holy faith unto the ends of the earth; and that to her may be “the gathering of the nations.”

* Jeremiah, xxxi. 34.

† Apocalypse, ii. 25.

‡ Isaiah, xi. 12.

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THE INFLUENCE OF CHRISTIANITY UPON SOCIETY.

COLOSSIANS, iii. 9, 10.

— *Seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds ;
And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge
after the image of Him that created him.*

WE have now considered the progress of the visible church of Christ on earth. We have observed its rise from the smallest beginnings ; and have seen the course of human events in every subsequent period of history, and not the least in our own times, arranged apparently to expedite and promote its success. But the gospel, though it should be known and professed in every region of the earth, will have failed of its principal design, unless it be also found to have made those, whom it has visited, better in this world, and consequently more fit for a state of future glory. Our Lord himself perpetually exhorts his disciples to amendment of life, to a change and renewal of their very nature. And, with a view to lead us to godliness ; to rescue us, not only from the penalty, but from the power of sin ; he has imparted his precepts full of heavenly wisdom, and he has exhibited the pattern of his own blameless life

during his ministry on earth. The great Apostle, who so strenuously insists on the spiritual benefits of the incarnation and sacrifice of Christ, tells us moreover, that he gave "himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." * And that this gracious design has not been altogether frustrated ; that, in spite of the manifold transgressions of individuals professing the gospel, the Christian world, on the whole, has advanced in virtue as well as in religious knowledge ; that, as God has been more fully revealed, his laws have been better obeyed, and his perfections better imitated ; in a word, that the great cause of human improvement has been promoted ; this is what I would endeavour to establish in the present Lecture.

But I would wish first to offer two or three general observations.

In the first place, in order justly to appreciate the present benefits derived to us from the gospel, we should resist the constant tendency of familiarity and long enjoyment to weaken the perception of any blessing ; and we should endeavour to figure to ourselves what might, even to the present day, have been our state, if Christianity had not interposed for our instruction and improvement. For this purpose it is proper to notice what reason alone had been able to effect for man, and from a view of its past achievements, to form a probable estimate of what

* Titus, ii. 14.

it might afterwards have accomplished, if it still had been left to its own exertions.

In the next place, we should observe that Christianity has done much for the benefit even of many persons, who abjure its authority. If, in religious speculations, it be thought that certain moderns of the deistical school have spoken, with a considerable degree of clearness and accuracy, on some points, as it is termed, of natural theology, it should be remembered that these persons have lived within the days of the gospel ; and that, when men have been accustomed, from the first dawn of intellect, to hear particular principles recognised by universal consent, it is difficult to suppose they have not received material assistance in their speculations on such subjects, however they may persuade themselves they adopt nothing but the deductions of their own reason. Or if, in the question of morals, it be urged that little difference can be perceived between the lives of Christians and of unbelievers, — even on the supposed, but by no means admitted justness of this observation, — it should be noticed that where Christianity forms the religious code of a nation ; — where it enters into the public institutions, and into most of the transactions of private life ; — where thousands of voices are constantly occupied in illustrating its doctrines and inculcating its maxims ; — the very air, if we may so say, becomes impregnated with the spirit of the gospel. Men, in the ordinary commerce of life, do not refer to their first principles, on every light occasion. They follow the cur-

rent of the world, and act as they see others around them act. If a particular set of opinions be generally recognised, they adopt them in practice without any minute regard to their origin. If a high standard of morals be established in society, they endeavour to come up to it, from the force of example, or from a desire to maintain a fair character with their friends and neighbours. As the source, from whence actions proceed, is open to the eye of God, they will, indeed, be estimated by him according to the principle to which they owe their birth. But an act, which has been done by one man in obedience to the declared will of God, and by another in conformity with common usage, may, to human eyes appear in the same light. And the apparent similarity may give rise to an inference very unfair to Christianity, unless we bear in mind, that the influence of the gospel is so considerable as to correct and amend the practice of many, who renounce and vilify it.

Again, as much praise, to which Christianity is fairly entitled, has been withdrawn from it, so it has, on the other hand, been blamed for much, of which it is entirely guiltless. The vices, which have belonged to some of its professors, have been imputed, not to the corrupt nature of man, which even the best religion cannot entirely correct, but to the religion itself. And, if there be some few evils, to which it may appear, at first sight, to have given the especial occasion, — such, for instance, as persecution and religious wars, — it should be re-

membered that these have sprung, not from genuine Christianity, which abhors and condemns them, but from Christianity misunderstood, perverted, and abused. The fact is, it is easy to be calm and tolerant in matters whereon we are indifferent. But, where a religion, like that of the gospel, occupies a very important department in human life, where it comes home to the business and bosoms of men, it will naturally awaken a lively and keen feeling; and this feeling, until it be corrected, as it undoubtedly will be corrected, by a closer acquaintance with the true spirit of the gospel, is apt at times to flame forth into an intemperate and destructive zeal. But the possibility of abuse always exists in proportion to the potency, and, consequently, the capability of good, in the principle. Nor should we condemn Christianity on the score of its occasional misapplications, unless we are at the same time prepared to pronounce, that neither liberty nor learning are blessings, because they both have been perverted to evil purposes. And it should be farther observed, that, in the great majority of cases that have been cited against Christianity, Christianity has in fact had nothing to do with the matter. It has been used merely as a pretence; it has been a vizard outwardly assumed. Designing men, knowing that religion forms a sensitive, a responsive string in the human heart, have touched it that it might grate harsh music, and that, in the discord which ensues, they might find or create an opportunity to pursue their own selfish and sinister purposes.

These few observations having been premised, let

us now proceed to trace the beneficial effects of the gospel, as briefly as the magnitude and importance of the subject will permit, on the great structure of human society.

And, first, let it not be a matter of surprise, if we are tempted to express a doubt, whether the revelation of Christ be not the sole cause that idolatry is not, to this day, the religion of the civilised world; and that it is not recommended even by philosophers, who, in secret, and to their more initiated disciples, might teach a purer and a sounder faith. At least, such a suspicion should not be thought extravagant, until there can be cited any one instance of a nation, which, after having yielded to idolatry, has been able, by the mere force of reason, and without any aid from revelation, to turn to the public, recognised, exclusive worship of the one true God, the creator and the ruler of the universe. History, I believe, furnishes no such example. It certainly must not be sought among the followers of Mahomet, since it is obvious their favourite tenet of the unity of the Godhead, although perverted and distorted from the truth as it is in the gospel, has been derived from Christianity. And, if we are thus indebted to the gospel, and to the gospel alone, for the extirpation of idolatry, this debt by itself is of incalculable amount and value. An obvious defect of idolatry, as it affected the question of human virtue and happiness, was its total separation from morality. To view it, in the first instance, in its least exceptionable and offensive form, it consisted merely of a few idle

pageantries and insignificant observances. But, in performing this worship, there was an entire want of that feeling, which arises in the heart of a Christian, as he approaches a God, who is himself of infinite purity, and who declares that "he is of purer eyes than to behold evil."* The rules of pagan worship were prescribed in no book, which, at the same time, inculcated maxims of exalted virtue, and which, in exhibiting the object to be adored with divine rites, exhibited a character where every excellence was embodied and exemplified. The priests were men appointed merely to perform the ceremonial rites of religion; not, as under the Christian system, separated from the rest of society, and expressly and professionally appointed, not only to be themselves "thoroughly furnished unto all good works," but to admonish and exhort others to righteousness, and to maintain and enforce, in every point, the inseparable connection between a pure faith and a holy life.

And it would have been well, if the evils of paganism had been confined to these negative defects, to this want of efficacy to promote any useful purpose. But it also tended to direct and positive and grievous evil. Over its impurities, over its indecencies, not only permitted, but sanctioned and prescribed, it is better to draw a veil. But its cruelties stand forth to the eye. In every system of idolatry a nearer inspection convinces us, that the beautiful

* Hab. i. 13.

picture of youths and virgins, presenting their oblations of fruits and flowers before the shrine of some bloodless deity, is but a vision of the imagination. In every country it tended to harden the heart, and, consequently, to debase the moral feelings. In every country, from east to west, from north to south, blood, human blood, reeked on its altar.* But, not to refer you to the well-known cruelties of ancient superstitions, nor to lose ourselves in the innumerable instances of sanguinary worship which modern idolatries present, let us select only two cases; let us first look to Mexico, at the period of its discovery, where the hideous and appalling aspect of the idols seemed to indicate the dreadful worship which they witnessed†, where the prisoners of war were solemnly immolated in the temple with rites the most ferocious, and where, to omit instances of extraordinary sacrifice, whose horrors almost forbid belief, the more moderate computations make the human victims annually slaughtered to amount to some thousands.‡ We may next turn our eyes to another part of the world, and see the

* The reader, who desires to see the extent to which human sacrifice has been carried in ancient and in modern superstitions, may see a great collection of facts in the illustrations of the Archbishop of Dublin's work on the Atonement, No. 5., and in Ryan's *History of the Effects of Religion on Mankind*, vol. i. p. 56, &c.

† Robertson, vol. x. pp. 308. 427.

‡ In Mexico their king Ahuitzol sacrificed sixty-four thousand and eighty men in the year 1468 at the consecration of a temple. Ryan, vol. i. p. 255.

true nature of idolatry displayed in our own days, and almost under our own eyes. We may look to India, and see devotees practising the most unnatural and torturing penances, parents and children exposed to be devoured by wild beasts, widows compelled to ascend the funeral pyre, and frantic crowds seeking death in its most frightful shapes by self-immolation. Let us reflect on these enormities, and then remember that they are dictated by a remorseless and debasing superstition.

A religion, which, in all respects, is the reverse of this picture; a religion, which, by its doctrines, its precepts, its sanctions, its examples, its institutions, is especially careful to prescribe and maintain purity in our personal conduct, and tenderness and mercy towards others, could hardly, we should suppose, be found to have been entirely inoperative to beneficial purposes. Accordingly, let us now look to experience, and let us endeavour to trace its operation in some of the great departments of human life.

Let us look, first, to the effect of Christianity upon public and international policy. It is unhappily for the purposes of mutual annoyance and destruction, that independent states come, for the most part, into direct contact with each other. And, although Christianity certainly has not yet been able to make wars altogether cease in the world, it has had the power considerably to mitigate them. I will not, in this instance, refer you to wild and barbarous tribes in their conduct of war, but rather to the most admired people of pagan antiquity. Let us observe

the Roman refusing quarter in battle, and, if not slaughtering his prisoners, yet subjecting them to indignities and miseries, perhaps worse than death, trampling on their neck, sending them under the yoke, leading them in triumph, exposing them publicly to sale, and reducing them to slavery. Let us next turn to Christian nations, and let us see them adopting into their code of public law the rules that, in hostilities, no gratuitous, no unnecessary pains, none that have not a direct tendency to bring the war to a successful termination, are warrantable; and that on prisoners there should be imposed no restrictions nor privations but those, which prevent them, for the time, from injuring their enemy.* Let us consider this contrast, and then say whether the spirit of the gospel, which breathes through our institutions, and which particularly inculcates mercy toward enemies, has not been mainly instrumental toward producing this honourable change.

From international policy let us direct our eyes to the civil government of Christian states. And here, whatever we may choose to say about their despotic forms, however much we may regret that they have not yet approached nearer to a perfect standard, we surely must perceive them to be, at least in practice and in execution, if not in theory, much in advance beyond the capricious, the wanton, the extravagant cruelty, the total disregard for the feelings or for the lives of human creatures, which marked the des-

* Vattel, *Droit des Gens*, l. iii. c. 8.

potisms of old times, or those, which, in the present day, are strangers to the name of Christ. For much of this melioration we clearly are indebted to the gospel. There cannot be a greater calumny than to represent Christianity as favourable to despotism. In fact, it does not interfere with forms of government. But, while, at its first promulgation, it studiously avoided even the appearance of taking any part in political matters; while, at all times, it enjoins as a religious duty the propriety of submitting peaceably to legitimate authority; it has introduced principles, which could not fail to produce a sure and steady, though not, perhaps, strikingly perceptible effect in improving the administration of governments. It has established the rights of man, in the true, the legitimate, the Christian sense of the expression. It declares the perfect equality of all mankind, in the great points of their equal dependence on the same almighty Creator, and their equal responsibility to the same almighty Judge. It declares that kindness and consideration are due from all to all, without respect of persons. These principles, in whatever degree they are carried into execution, cannot fail to introduce a certain amendment into the administration, and, ultimately, into the constitution, of governments. They teach that, as all mankind are precious in the sight of God, their lives may not be wantonly sacrificed, their properties may not be arbitrarily seized, their persons may not be cruelly tormented, their feelings may not be capriciously harassed. And it surely would be in-

justice to deny, that these principles of Christianity, co-operating with the advancement of knowledge and civilisation, have already produced, and promise in a much greater degree yet to produce, an immense improvement in the condition of that very large portion of mankind, who are the subjects of civil government.

From public, let us turn our views to private life. And here, I think, we shall see the beneficial effects of Christianity yet more strikingly demonstrated. The female sex, a moiety of the human race, is under a debt of peculiar obligation to the gospel. As the woman, in punishment for her original transgression, was made subject to the man, so, throughout the times of paganism, we invariably find her in a state of degradation. But in nothing is the restorative tendency of the gospel more apparent, than in her reinstatement in her proper rank in society. The whole tenor of the gospel elevates and dignifies the female sex. The Saviour of the world was born, as no one else ever was born, of woman; and among women he found some of his most zealous friends and devoted disciples. In the earliest annals of Christianity, the female converts occupy a prominent station, and they were permitted to bear no unimportant part in the administration of the infant church. The apostolical precepts respecting the conduct of women are all such as tend to give them respectability, by making them worthy of respect*;

* 1 Pet. iii. 2, &c. 1 Tim. iii. 11. v. 3, &c.

and, when they treat of the conjugal relation, they invariably speak of reciprocal duties between the husband and the wife.* In the conjugal relation, the gospel, moreover, has not a little improved the condition of the woman, by forbidding polygamy and by diminishing the facility of divorce. Where a plurality of wives is permitted, constant experience tells us, the woman is taught to consider herself merely as the object of the sensual passions of man; and, being trained for no higher rank in the sphere of domestic life, she contracts all the slavish fear, all the low cunning, all the petty jealousy, all the debasing ignorance, incidental to such a station. Where divorce can be too readily obtained, she is liable, when the passion of man has once been satiated, to be cast off and abandoned. Or, where the connection continues to subsist, much of that obligation to mutual concession and mutual endearment, which arises from the indissoluble nature of the bond, is withdrawn. But, when the gospel removed these evils, God may be said once more to “have brought the woman unto the man†,” and to have presented her to him, in a sense which long had been scarcely applicable, as the partner of his life and the mother of his children; and by this happy change he has added incalculable strength to the whole structure of domestic virtue.

Observations somewhat similar may be made respecting the next great relation of human life, that

* Eph. v. 22. 25. 1 Pet. iii. 1. 7.

† Gen. ii. 22.

of parent and child. We know the inordinate and cruel powers, which, in the most cultivated states of pagan antiquity, were possessed by the father over his children. He might at first refuse to rear them ; for many years he continued to hold their life at his pleasure ; and he was encouraged always to maintain toward them that distant and forbidding regard, which belongs more to the master toward his slave, than to the father toward his son. But better things have been taught by the gospel. Not only is the murderous power of life and death withdrawn, but a more affectionate, a more liberal intercourse between parent and child is introduced. And, while the son receives no encouragement to relax in his filial duties, the parent, both by the specific precepts and by the general spirit of the gospel, is taught to provide for the temporal and spiritual welfare of his offspring, and to temper his just authority with kindness and gentleness.*

Neither, in the change thus introduced into the conjugal and parental relations, can it be said that what is gained by the one party is lost by the other. It is an invariable law of human nature, that despotism should recoil with painful violence upon the despot. The excessive powers, possessed by the husband and father of old times, were inimical, not less to his own happiness, than to that of the subjects of his domestic tyranny ; and whatever degree of authority he has lost is more than compensated by

* Eph. vi. 4. Col. iii. 21.

the different feelings introduced into private life. No longer an arbitrary master, he must love and respect, while he rules, his family; and, on their part, the trembling fear of the slave gives place to the willing obedience and the cheerful duty, which arise from a sense of benefits received, from a voluntary compliance with the suggestions of reason and religion, from the free-will offering of the heart.

Let us next look to another very important relation of domestic life, that of master and servant. It is unnecessary to dwell on the painful and frightful details of the system of slavery in pagan times. It may be sufficient to say, that in the state, the most celebrated for wisdom in ancient times, the number of slaves, of human beings, who held their lives by no other tenure than the will of an arbitrary master, was of fearful amount.* The religion of Christ

* I am not aware of any exact calculation of the amount of the slave population of ancient Rome. But from incidental accounts we are led to suppose that it must have been very great. To show the numbers, Gibbon (vol i. p. 66.) quotes Pliny (Hist. Nat. l. xxxiii.) and Athenæus, (Deipnosophist. l. vi. p. 272.) which latter asserts, that he knew very many Romans who possessed, not for use, but ostentation, ten and even twenty thousand slaves. The historian of the Decline and Fall also refers to Seneca, *De Clementia*, l. i. c. 24., whence it appears, that a proposition to distinguish the slaves by their dress was abandoned on account of the danger to be apprehended from a discovery of their numbers; “*Deinde apparuit quantum periculum immineret, si servi nostri numerare nos cœpissent.*” See also Seneca, *De Tranquillitate Animi*, c. 8. The 47th Ep.

immediately addressed itself to correct this monstrous evil. Without forcibly disturbing the arrangements of society, by merely inculcating maxims, which inevitably lead to the practice of justice and humanity, it gradually relaxed the bonds of slavery ; first, by procuring a milder treatment for those unhappy beings ; and next, by emancipating the domestic, and, in later times, the predial slaves. Nor, while it is universally acknowledged that this triumph over inhumanity is mainly due to the exertions of the Christian religion, can there be a stronger proof of the gradual and imperceptible, and, consequently, wise manner in which the triumph was effected, than that no point in modern history is involved in greater obscurity, than the precise mode and time of the cessation of slavery. May both the process and the result be the same, in the attack which the gospel is now making on the last remains of slavery in the Christian world !

As somewhat analogous to the system of slavery, we may also mention the sanguinary shows of gladiators, exhibited by the Romans for the amusement of the public, and even introduced to enliven private entertainments. This was a practice against which the Christian teachers from the beginning remon-

of Seneca gives a melancholy picture of the ordinary treatment of slaves. In Tacitus, *Ann.* l. xiv. cc. 43, 44., there is an account of four hundred slaves being put to death for a murder committed by one of their number.

strated, and which was forbidden for the first time by the first Christian emperor.

Nor should we omit to observe the effects of Christianity on one other grand and more general division of society, the rich and the poor. A very remarkable circumstance in heathen ethics, — a circumstance arising, probably, from their system of domestic slavery, — is the almost total omission of any duties owed by the rich to the more indigent classes of society. This disregard extended even beyond this life, and their imaginary elysium appears to have been open only to those, whose eminence in station or in talents enabled them to confer extensive benefits on their fellow-creatures, to heroes, poets, artists, or statesmen.* But the gospel, which was preached by poor men, addressed itself to the poor, and also took them under its especial care. Hence, wherever the gospel prevails, the poor are become the objects of a commiseration and a sympathy before unknown. And in the various provisions for their corporal, for their mental, for their spiritual welfare; in the numerous establishments for the relief or the solace of almost every evil that flesh is heir to; we see a delightful testimony rendered

* Hic manus, ob patriam pugnando vulnera passi,
Quique sacerdotes casti, dum vita manebat,
Quique pii vates, et Phæbo digna locuti,
Inventas aut qui vitam excoluere per artes,
Quique sui memores alios fecere merendo:
Omnibus his niveâ cinguntur tempora vittâ.

ÆNEID, VI. 660.

by most Christian nations, to the efficacy of the precepts of the gospel. History records with grateful pleasure the name of the Christian matron *, the first person who ever founded an hospital for the sick and necessitous.

I need not, however, remark, that of charity, — of that great evangelical grace which Christianity has designated as peculiarly its own, — bounty to the poor is but one branch. We know its comprehensive character, its extensive bearings, expounded and enforced as it has been by the eloquent language of the apostolical writers, and by the still more forcible eloquence of their lives. We know the tendency of charity, in its enlarged signification, to humanise society, to sweeten ordinary life, to mitigate, almost to subdue, every calamity that can afflict our nature. And if now, turning our views from particular departments and relations of life, we will survey the Christian world at large, we may indeed be tempted to lament, that the precepts of the gospel have not yet been more perfectly carried into execution ; but we must still be inclined to believe they have been practised to a degree, that has materially promoted the well-being of society. The gospel, as it has tended to tranquillise the irascible passions, to restrain the emotions of malevolence and revenge, to make men placable under injuries, and patient under afflictions ; in all this, it has breathed over human life a calm unknown to other systems,

* Jortin's Remarks on Eccles. Hist. vol. iii. p. 71.

and most conducive to happiness. It is true, in order to perceive these blessed effects, we should not so much appeal to public history. I feel, indeed, thoroughly convinced, and have endeavoured to show, that, even into public life, Christianity has already introduced great improvements, and promises, as it shall gradually disencumber itself of all the rubbish by which it has been overlaid, to introduce improvements yet greater. But, for the point now in question, we should look chiefly to those, whose names will never be blazoned in the page of history. We must look to the walks of private life. Nor is more necessary than that each man should cast his eyes around on the circle, with whom chance or choice has made him acquainted. And I think it may be said he has been unfortunate, if he does not instantly see numbers quietly, calmly, unostentatiously pursuing the path of private virtue ; labouring, under no eye but that of God, to regulate their own lives ; and seeking, with no view to human applause, to alleviate the sufferings, or to promote the positive enjoyments, of all with whom they are connected. And, if such be the result to each man of his own observation and experience, let him only suppose that what happens to himself happens also to others ; that, in other spheres and societies, there is an equal number of persons, who are careful, to the best of their ability, to “ walk in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless * ;” and then let him

* Luke, i. 6.

calculate, if indeed he can hope to calculate, the amount of positive good produced on human society by the blessed influence of the gospel of Christ.

Nor is this all. There are triumphs of Christianity, which never can be known but to the individual who achieves them, and whose fragrance, like that of some precious essences, evaporates the instant that it is opened and exposed. In such cases, the gospel operates unseen, and is known more by its results than in its actual process. When we curb the temper; when we suppress the rising emotions of resentment; when we forgive injuries, not only with our lips, but, in the emphatic language of our Saviour, *from the heart*; when we stifle the licentious passions in their very birth; when we “bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ* ;” these things, as they tend not to correct, but to intercept and prevent evil, can scarcely, from their very nature, be known to others. Their praise altogether consists in their secrecy. But He, “who seeth in secret, shall reward them openly ;” since to Him is known, not only the difficulty of the achievement, but also its real importance and its intrinsic value.

And now, having traced the beneficial effects of Christianity on international and on national policy, on some of the great departments of domestic life, as well as on the general composition of society; let us conclude this survey, by endeavouring to de-

* 2 Cor. x. 5.

lineate that abstract model of perfection, which we suppose might be produced in the Christian school, in contrast with the production of any other system, which has professed with any success to teach moral excellence.

In seeking our contrasts to the gospel, we are perpetually remitted to the celebrated states of Greece and Rome, both as being the states of paganism the best known to us, and also as being those, which are admitted by universal consent to be the exemplar nations, and which, consequently, enable us to make our comparisons with the greatest fairness. Of those two states, the former, we know, was more especially the mistress of philosophy; while the latter people, as acting on a larger and more conspicuous theatre, furnish the best illustrations of that philosophy carried into action.

The prevalent systems of moral philosophy (for of their psychological systems I do not at present speak) may in general be reduced under two heads. Although there was an infinite number of minor ramifications, the Epicurean and the Stoic systems may be considered as the representatives of the opposite doctrines, which divided the regard of the civilised world. Neither in adverting to those systems, would I delineate them as they were perverted and abused by their injudicious friends, still less as they were misrepresented by their opponents and rivals. Let us rather consider them in their best and purest state.

Of the Epicurean philosophy the great principle

was, that the chief good consisted in pleasure. And to this principle it is a sufficient objection, that it was liable, not to slight and occasional, but to grievous, constant, and unavoidable abuse; since, even to take pleasure in its most enlarged and philosophical sense, few persons would possess such correctness of mental vision, as rightly to foresee what would truly and ultimately promote their pleasurable existence, or such strength of volition, as always to pursue it at the expense of immediate abstinence and self-denial. Still it is unquestionably true, that neither by his precepts nor by his example, did the founder of the Epicurean philosophy teach that pleasure consisted in sensual and vicious gratification. On the contrary, temperance, chastity, integrity, and other virtues, were recommended and practised by himself, on the principle, that the opposite vices, as they produced in the end disquietude, discredit, and pain, would lead their votaries widely astray from their desired object. But the overwhelming fault of this system was a rooted selfishness. It was from self-interest, it was with a view to self-gratification, that the epicurean was pure, or temperate, or just. And, as his very principles withdrew him from the practice of active benevolence, he became an unprofitable member of society. Like his imaginary deity, sufficient to his own happiness, and withdrawn from the cares and fatigues of business, he passed his life in a state of inaction, of secretly cherished satisfaction at the contemplation of his own su-

periority to the desires and passions which agitated the common herd.

The Stoic philosophy, on the other hand, led its votaries into active life, though it ill qualified them for discharging its offices with effect. As the Epicurean attempted too little, so the Stoic attempted too much : and the ill effects, which selfishness produced in the one, were in the other produced by pride. The Stoic lived in a world of his own creation, and proceeded on a fantastic, a preposterous, an unnatural view of things. In his overstrained zeal for virtue, he considered every deviation from it as of equal demerit. By his visionary doctrines, he rendered virtue unamiable, and even ridiculous. In his vain attempt to raise himself above the ordinary feelings of nature, he became harsh and unfeeling. In his regard for the public weal, he neglected the charities, if not the decencies of private life. Grasping at a vast good, and one unattainable from its very vastness, he overlooked that which lay directly before him, and which might have been easily effected. And, at length, disappointed in his aims, and refusing to see that the disappointment was in great measure to be attributed to his own untractable system, he retired in disgust from a world, with which he had lived in perpetual conflict ; or ended in a melancholy scepticism as to the real existence of virtue.*

* See the account of the death of Brutus in Dion Cassius, lib. vii. p. 356. Leunclavii.

In contrast to these characters, let us look to the Christian, who carries into execution, as far as the weakness of human nature permits, the precepts of his divine philosophy. He proceeds on no false views of human life. He is taught that he is placed in this world as on a stage, where he must exercise himself, and must labour to cultivate those habits and dispositions, which will determine his destiny in the life that is to come. The leading principle of his conduct is the desire to promote the glory of God. To the moral law he endeavours to render the strictest obedience, and lives “soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world*,” not merely because such conduct will secure his own ease, but because such is the divine will. By the same principle, carried out of selfish considerations for his own comfort and tranquillity, he endeavours to promote the welfare of his fellow-creatures by every labour of love; by great exertions, if occasion for great exertions arise; or, on smaller occasions, by the offices of every-day benevolence and affection. That his labour may not be in vain, he strives, as far as it can be done with innocency, to accommodate himself to the temper and manners of those around him. But, while he is thus engaged in a course of active usefulness, no emotions of self-sufficiency swell within his heart. The consciousness of his own weakness and infirmity presses on him too heavily, to permit him for a moment to fancy him-

* Tit. ii. 12.

self superior to those whom he endeavours to befriend. Thence meekness and humility lend a grace to every deed of charity. Knowing himself to be liable to the casualties and distresses of life, he “rejoices with them that do rejoice, and weeps with them that weep.”* Sensible that he himself stands in need of a favourable and indulgent judgment, he is slow to judge others, and is ready to forgive, as he himself desires forgiveness. To every affliction he patiently submits as to a dispensation from the hands of his heavenly Father, intended to prove or to correct him, and capable, by a right use, of being turned to his present or his future good. Above all, knowing that within him “dwelleth no good thing,” he is “jealous over himself with a godly jealousy†,” and places the strictest watch upon his heart, as upon that avenue, by which sin first gains an entrance and dominion over him.

Such is a faint, a very faint, delineation of a Christian, considered as a member of society. In proportion as Christianity has tended to produce such persons, it has exalted the individual character and promoted the general good, in a manner unknown and scarcely conceived under any other system. That any one has ever realised all these ideal excellencies cannot, we fear, be said. Such holiness is as yet “too excellent for us; we cannot attain unto it.”‡ But, when we consider the

* Rom. xii. 15.

† 2 Cor. xi. 2.

‡ Ps. cxxxix. 6.

long train of Christian worthies who have shone like lights in their day; when we endeavour to calculate how many more, in the shade of retirement, have laboured by “a patient continuance in well-doing*,” “to adorn the doctrine of God their Saviour in all things†,” — we may not, indeed, specify individuals, —but we may bless and praise God that he has put his grace into the hearts of so many of his servants; who have shown, experimentally shown, of what excellence man is capable, when, with the gospel in his hand, with his eye steadily fixed on the great model there held forth for his imitation, and with his heart open to the influences of the Spirit of truth and holiness, he labours zealously and unremittingly to subdue his corrupt nature, and to be renewed “in knowledge after the image of him that created him.”

* Rom. ii. 7.

† Tit. ii. 10.

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See Vol. I. p. 135. of the Sunday Library

THE LABOURERS IN THE VINEYARD.

MATTHEW, XX. 1.

The Kingdom of Heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which went out early in the morning, to hire labourers into his vineyard.

IT is not very easy for us to form a notion of the strength of the national prejudices, prevalent in Israel, at the time of our Lord's appearance on earth. It is well known that they regarded themselves as foremost in the favour of God. They believed that their nation was placed, as it were, in the very centre of his dispensations; and that all the dealings of Jehovah would tend to the establishment of their own grandeur, and the comparative debasement of the rest of mankind. To propose the admission of other nations to an equality of privileges with the chosen race, would seem to an Israelite not merely an extravagant absurdity, but almost like an overthrow of the order of nature. He no more doubted that his countrymen stood, and to the end of time would continue to stand, far above the rest of the world in the divine favour, than he doubted that men are, and always must be, higher in the order of the creation than brutes. To

tell him that such a distinction was immediately to cease, was, *almost*, like telling him, that irrational creatures were to be admitted to the rank and privileges of man. When the woman of Canaan besought our Saviour to heal her daughter, he answered, that "he was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel;" and that it was "not meet to take the children's bread, and cast it to dogs."* The reply was, doubtless, designed, to try the faith of the heart-broken parent; but it gave, at the same time, an exact representation of the popular feeling of that age.

The history and the fate of these unsocial prejudices is very strikingly set forth in the parable, which begins with the words which I have read, and which seems to have been framed (though not perhaps exclusively) with a view to the peculiar notions of the Jews, and in order to prepare the world for the utter disappointment of their hopes. Before, however, we proceed to a detailed consideration of the parable, it may be useful to recommend one caution, necessary in the interpretation of all these short allegories; namely, that we abstain from too nice an application of all the circumstances, which may be introduced into the narrative, for the purpose of heightening its interest and effect. The general scope and tendency is chiefly to be sought, without searching for an important sense in every minute detail: a mode of exposition which is pro-

* Matthew, xv. 27, &c.

ductive of nothing but embarrassment and perversion.

1. Considered, then, with reference to the chosen people, the import of the parable is obvious enough. The labourers who were hired at the earliest hour are the children of Israel, collectively and nationally. They were early favoured with the knowledge of the true God. They were employed by Him to do His work. They were especially dedicated to His service. They were intrusted with the office of preserving His name and worship on earth. They had a vineyard appointed for their labours ; in other words, they had a certain region of usefulness and duty assigned to them ; and they were expected to make the province committed to their occupation fruitful in every thing conducive to the honour of His name. Their hire for this service was expressly told them. The terms on which they were admitted into covenant with God were distinctly stated. They knew the conditions on which they were to become labourers in his vineyard ; and if those conditions were fulfilled, they could have no just reason for complaint.

The vineyard, thus occupied, remained, nevertheless, still open to the industry of others, who were willing to be hired ; and, as the day advanced, additional numbers were admitted within its pale. The first members of the Jewish church were the immediate descendants of Abraham ; and these may be considered as belonging to the class, whose employment in the Lord's enclosure commenced

from the earliest hour. In the process of time, the Jewish church was augmented by an influx of proselytes from the heathen nations. And these, on renouncing the worship of idols, and embracing the whole of the Mosaic law, were received into the Covenant of God. An Hebrew of the Hebrews, however, seldom regarded these, his adopted brethren, with much kindness or respect. It is doubtful whether they were ever admitted to any office of trust or dignity in Israel. And it is certain that the notion of their equality with the children of Abraham would, at all times, have been spurned with indignation.

At last the eleventh hour arrives; and even at that period the vineyard is open, and fresh labourers are still engaged. And such is the bounty of the Lord of the vineyard, that he abates nothing of their hire on account of the late commencement of their toil. They had stood inactive in the marketplace because no one had offered to employ them. They shall, therefore, incur no loss for their involuntary idleness. Their wages shall be the same, as if they had been brought to their work at the first dawning of the day.

In the arrival of the eleventh hour, who can fail to perceive the accomplishment of the fulness of time, when the “mystery of Christ*” should be disclosed; when the gates of the church should be thrown open to mankind; when “the Gentiles

* Eph. iii. 4.

should be fellow-heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ by the Gospel?"* And who can reflect on this part of the parable without seeing that the kingdom of heaven is not, in truth, a distinct thing from the Jewish dispensation, but rather, the last and most perfect stage of it; the consummation of one grand and consistent design for the discipline, and the redemption of the human race? The Jews, indeed, could discern no features of divine goodness and wisdom in the gospel of the Nazarene, with its comprehensive invitations and promises. They regarded it as an unholy imposture; as a fraud, by which their hopes were overthrown, and their privileges wickedly invaded. And accordingly they rebelled against the "eternal purpose of God †," which was then made manifest. They thought that such a payment and distribution, as this parable implies, would, on the very face of it, be iniquitous, and inconsistent with the declared scheme of God's providence. The Gentiles had, for ages, been ignorant of God, and aliens from His family. They had, to that moment, done nothing in His service. How then could it be just to lavish upon *them* the advantages and honours assigned by *the sure word of prophecy* to the seed of Abraham? How was it to be believed, that the Eternal Master would make *them* equal to those faithful servants, who had so long borne "the heat and burden" of His chastising dispensations, and the galling yoke of the Mosaic law?

* Eph. iii. 6. 11.

† Ibid.

To these unholy murmurings the Hebrews might read the answer, in the words of the householder in the parable. "Friend, I do thee no wrong. Didst thou not agree with me for a fixed reward? Take that thine is, and go thy way. I will give unto this last, even as unto thee. Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good?" And O that Israel had listened to these blessed words! that the daughter of Zion had known the things that belonged unto her peace! But, alas! they were hidden from her sight. She dared madly to wrestle against the decrees of the Almighty, and to look with an *evil eye* on those whom the Father of Mercies had chosen and made strong for himself. She spurned at her own felicity and glory, because the son of the stranger was called to be partaker of her joy! She loathed to eat bread in the kingdom of God, because multitudes from the East and from the West were graciously invited to sit down with her at the feast! She despised the wages of the Master of the Vineyard, because the hirelings of the eleventh hour were gladdened with the fulness of His bounty. She set her face, like a flint, against the sovereignty of Jehovah, and the blessedness of His creatures. And the result was such as must always be looked for when man striveth with his Maker, and when the potsherd smiteth the rock: her house is left unto her desolate; her children are scattered to the four winds of heaven; and she is become a proverb and a by-word; an astonishment and a curse!

But brighter days are in store for Israel, if there be truth in the oracles of God. When first called to embrace the gospel of Christ, small indeed was the remnant that obeyed the call, and attained to the blessedness of His chosen and peculiar people.* And the sentence accordingly went forth, that the last should be first, and the first last*; that the Gentiles, whom they scorned, should long be foremost in the ranks of salvation; and that ages should pass away before the whole seed of Abraham should be “provoked to emulation,” and should turn unto the Lord, and claim once more their exalted rank as the first-born of God. But when that period shall arrive, “then shall all Israel be saved.” The elder church shall arise and shake herself from the dust; Jerusalem shall put on strength, and clothe herself in beautiful garments, and everlasting joy shall be upon her head. The abundance of the sea shall be converted unto her, and the forces of the Gentiles shall come unto her. Her fall was the riches of the world: much more shall her fulness be the consummation of gladness to the whole earth. She shall then be made an eternal excellence, a joy of many generations!

So much for the more immediate object for which this parable was spoken by our Lord. And here, in the opinion of some expositors, we are to stop. They contend, that as the words were uttered to illustrate the dealings of God with his church, we must for-

* Matt. xx. 16.

bear the application of them to any other purpose. They seem to apprehend, that to fix, in any case, a double sense on the sacred text, is to forget the respect due to it; and, as it were, to make it "couch between two burdens;" of which one or the other must be imposed, not by the Holy Ghost, but by the caprice or presumption of man. And they accordingly deny, that this passage of Scripture is capable of the exposition frequently given of it. They deny that the labourers may be taken to represent individual Christians; or that the various hours of their hiring correspond to the different periods of life, at which a course of piety and virtue may commence; or that the wages assigned to all, have any reference to retribution hereafter. They deny, in short, that the parable affords any instruction directly interesting to particular persons at the present day.

In support of these views they affirm, in the first place, that the narrative can have no application whatever to professing Christians, because all such are actually in the vineyard. They are members of the visible church. They are already in the service of God. They have entered upon His employment, and accepted His conditions. They may, indeed, be idle in the vineyard; or, they may be worse than idle, they may make spoil and havoc in it. They may desolate the heritage of God by the blight and mildew of their abominable lives. Nevertheless, their case, it is urged, has no parallel in the allegory before us, which refers only to those who were idle for want of employment, but accepted work the moment they could find it.

Again ; the hire of the labourers, it is affirmed, can be no fit representation of the rewards of heaven. Those rewards, there is reason to believe, will be righteously proportioned to the various actions and deserts of men. In one essential respect, therefore, they bear no resemblance to the equal compensation, awarded in the parable, to all without distinction. Besides, we find the justice of the Master of the vineyard disputed. His wages are received with murmuring and discontent by the earlier labourers : a circumstance to which there can be nothing answerable at the day of final retribution. The spirits of the righteous will never be found to look with evil eye upon each other, or to contend against the decrees and appointments of their judge.

Such are the reasonings of those who resist any application of this parable to the reformation of sinners at the earlier or later stages of life. I can hardly persuade myself, that minds capable of raising such objections, are in a condition to derive from the sacred oracles all the riches they contain, or to guide others into the ways of Divine truth. Remarks like these can never originate in an understanding which has entered thoroughly and deeply into the spirit of the sacred compositions. It is true, that the parable tells us of a fixed remuneration to all the persons employed in the vineyard, whether their toil commenced with the dawning of the day, or was delayed till the approach of evening. And what is the language of the gospel of Christ ? Does it not promise heaven to all who truly repent before

they are summoned to their account? If life is commenced in the fear of God, and the man perseveres in a course of faithful and unwearied service to the end, what is the reward? What, but a participation in the glory and blessedness of the Redeemer's kingdom? But what if the earlier portion of his existence be passed in sloth or ignorance, and the work of moral and spiritual renovation be delayed until the night is coming on? What say the Scriptures then? Do they say less to the tardy, but sincere and heart-broken penitent, than they do to him that rose up early, and bore the heat and burden of the day? Are not the benefits of Christ's sufferings and mediation offered equally to both? Are they not each encouraged to hope, that they shall enter into the joy of their Lord? Is it, then, any perversion or abuse of language to aver, that the same recompense is held out for the encouragement of Christians, at every stage of their existence? Heaven, it is true, may be a place of higher or of lower enjoyment, according to the state of those who enter it. And with equal justice may it be affirmed, that the same earthly recompense may be the instrument of various degrees of comfort, according to the habits of those who receive it. The correspondence of the two cannot, therefore, be affected by this consideration. The joys of heaven are offered to the Christian, precisely in the same sense, that the stipulated wages were offered to the hirelings of the vineyard.

But then we are reminded, that the comparison

fails in this other respect ; that there can be no murmuring in heaven against the dispensations of the Almighty. But if this were a valid objection, there could be no such thing as an illustration of heavenly things by earthly. Murmuring in heaven there will, undoubtedly, be none. But yet the Lord of heaven and earth may, surely, in his condescension, state to us, for our instruction, the reasons, by which all murmurings might be put down, if they could possibly arise. The discontented labourers are rebuked by a reference to the Master's right over his own ; and they are reminded, that his goodness to the later labourers could inflict no injury on those, who received in full measure what they agreed to take. To the saints in heaven, considerations like these will naturally and inevitably occur, without suggestion ; and the office of such reflections will be, not to correct murmuring, but to render murmuring impossible. And what must be the value of that judgment which would exact, in a parable, a more complete resemblance than this, between the things compared ?

With regard to the general objection, (that the parable was spoken purely with a view to the call of the Gentiles, and therefore ought not to be used for any other purpose,) it must be allowed to originate in a caution, which ought not wholly to be condemned. Measureless are the evils which the church would have been spared, if the work of interpretation had always been approached with more of this sobriety of mind. Assuredly, the imposition of

a double sense upon scriptural texts is an expedient which never should be lightly or hastily resorted to. But, on the other hand, why should we close our eyes even upon indirect and collateral instruction, where the tenor of the sacred text appears almost to force it on our attention? A parable, for instance, may be so constructed and so expressed, as mainly to illustrate some particular subject: but the choice of figures and of language may, at the same time, be such, as to convey a lesson of much more comprehensive and general application. In such a case, then, why are we to reject any portion of the profit which the word of God seems plainly to offer us? Why are we to look, inflexibly, in one direction, when "the mind of the Spirit" appears to take a wider range?

Consider the parable of the Prodigal Son, and see what treasures of wisdom and consolation would be lost, by obedience to this scrupulous and excessive jealousy. No one questions that this parable has a direct and obvious reference to the case of the Jews and Gentiles: of the Jews who for ages had been in covenant with God; of the Gentiles who had fallen away from him, and yet were received back to the full and equal enjoyment of his favour, on renouncing their abominations. But who will ever consent to part with the precious encouragement which the same parable offers to every individual penitent? Who can mistake the gracious language which it speaks to the returning sinner, when once he is ready to exclaim, "Father, I have

sinned against Heaven and before Thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son? ”

In the same manner, it may be granted, that the present parable has a more direct and immediate reference to the dealings of the Almighty with Jews and heathens nationally considered. But let any one who hears it consult his understanding and his heart, and say whether they do not protest against the confinement of its application to them? Can any candid mind resist the conviction, that the narrative is so conceived as to illustrate the ways of God with individual sinners, as well as with collective societies of men? Can any one doubt, that when Christ uttered these words, his views extended to the mysterious exercise of God's sovereignty towards every soul of man respectively and distinctly? Our Lord himself has been pleased to leave this parable without any exposition. Why then should we abstain from an application of it, which its language will fairly warrant; especially if such application be in accordance with the whole truth as it in Jesus?

Without any fantastic refinement, it may be affirmed, that the teaching of our blessed Lord has a sort of expansive quality; a power of self-developement by which it adapts itself to the moral exigencies of the world as they arise. And so wonderful is this power, that many of the parables may be said to have something of a prophetic stamp; to be conceived in a spirit of prediction, embracing the numberless varieties of human wickedness and frailty which, in the course of time,

should be made manifest by his heart-searching gospel. He always speaks as one who knew what was in man : as one who saw into the depth of our corruptions, and was well acquainted both with our weakness and our strength. And therefore it is, that he spake as never man spake. His sayings were delivered with an authority which never attended the masters of Israel, or the sages of the heathen schools ; and the subsequent history of the world is a continued commentary on the incomparable wisdom of his instructions. Deeply impressed with these convictions, I shall proceed, in another discourse, to a more detailed consideration of the parable before us in its application to the various seasons at which men turn to God. And I shall do this without any fear of ascribing to our Lord a more comprehensive and profound design, than he himself had in contemplation, when he delivered it.

I cannot, however, dismiss the subject for the present, without, once more, adverting to a point, already noticed incidentally. The parable in question will certainly be found in one respect to fail of an exact application to those who profess and call themselves Christians ; namely, that they among them who shall be found faithful, will carry to the bar of heaven no disposition to complain of its decrees. The earlier labourers (if taken to denote those who, in the earlier periods of their life, begin to be earnest in the work of salvation,) can never be supposed to grudge the extension of the divine

bounty to such as commence their course of exertion at a later period. On the contrary, their souls will magnify the Lord, and their spirits will greatly rejoice in God their Saviour, when they behold him throwing open the gates of mercy, even at the last hour. They will exult in the triumph of his sovereign grace, which can rescue a victim from the very jaws of perdition, and exalt him to bliss and glory, when the shadows of eternal death seemed ready to close upon him. If we have one particle of heavenly mindedness, we too, like the inhabitants of heaven, must rejoice in the preservation of every returning penitent. They who would be perfect, even as our heavenly Father is perfect, will, like him, desire that all may be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth. How can men, who are conscious of the presence of God, and who remember in what an immense amount they are debtors to his patience and long-suffering, — how can they be comparing the grains and scruples of their own miserable deserts ; and watching, with an unhallowed jealousy, the awards of Omnipotence ? Or how can the Christian cast an evil eye on the dealings of Him, who, by the very necessity of his nature, is perfect both in righteousness and mercy ?

Not that the warning conveyed by this part of the parable is wholly useless, even where the gospel is most joyfully received, and most faithfully reduced to practice. The purest spirits are sometimes harassed by the incursions of envy and un-

charitableness. And saddening it is to think what bitterness these evil tempers will often pour into the chalice of our peace and joy. Alas, for human nature! The success of the dearest friend on earth may prove a trial too severe for its attachment and fidelity. We can, perhaps, "weep with them that weep." We can share the sorrows and calamities of the unfortunate. We can stand by our brother in the hour of need and peril. Peradventure we can be faithful to him, even unto death. But always to "rejoice with them that do rejoice," is a strain of heroism too high for human benevolence and virtue. It is an achievement which may beggar the resources of the most generous and kindly spirit on earth. Let the man to whom our heart is knit, and who is as our own soul, be brought into competition with our own pretensions, and instantly we are in danger of looking coldly upon him. Our eye is evil against our brother; and we forget that He who alone is good will look angrily upon us, if we appear before Him with this unholy insurrection of our feelings against his righteous appointments and distributions. The interests of this world, it is true, are most apt to give activity to the working of this impure leaven. But its subtlety will sometimes poison even our spiritual joys, and "put rancours into the vessel" of Christian charity itself. What is it that causes us to look, not with salutary caution only, but, sometimes, with an approach to jealousy and scorn, upon the history of late repentances? What is it that sometimes rises up against the freeness

with which salvation is offered to the chief of sinners, at every period of their lives? Is it not the same spirit which caused the earliest hirelings to murmur? the same which roused the indignation of the elder brother when the prodigal was welcomed home? the same which was offended with the Saviour of mankind, when he sat at meat with publicans and sinners?

Surely we must read in this parable a fearful condemnation of the temper which thus revolts against the dispensations of the Most High. It is a temper which can find no place in heaven. It is a temper, therefore, which must shut heaven against all who, on earth, suffer it to gain the dominion. All who indulge it are, more or less, degraded to the likeness of the Jews, who cherished a hatred against their species, and who rejected the Son of God, because the whole human brotherhood was embraced in his scheme of mercy. Next to personal iniquity and unholiness, nothing can be named more adverse to the Cross of Christ, than this narrow and censorious frame of mind. There is one mark which is never wanting in the true disciple of Him who quenched not the smoking flax, and broke not the bruised reed; in passing judgment on himself he is rigorous and unsparing; he is mild and liberal in his estimate of the spiritual condition of his brethren. Examine yourselves by this rule, ye that are in the Lord's vineyard, and labouring for your hire. While you are toiling to secure your own reward, during the heat and burden of the day, be prepared to

welcome a repenting brother, who has loitered till the approach of evening ; and rejoice that the Divine goodness is ready to accept his earnest, though late, endeavour to redeem the time.

THE LABOURERS IN THE VINEYARD.

MATTHEW, XX. 1.

The Kingdom of Heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which went out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard.

IN a former discourse on this parable, we considered it, first, with reference to the various periods of the Jewish church, and the admission of the Gentiles to the privileges of the Gospel dispensation. We also adverted to the objections started by some expositors, to a more extended interpretation; and endeavoured to show that such objections were unfounded. We now proceed to view the parable in the aspect which it bears towards all who at this day belong to the visible church of Christ.

It has already been remarked, that the application of the discourse to persons of this description has been denied, on the ground that all who profess the gospel belong properly and strictly to that class of labourers who have actually been hired; and that this is a circumstance which destroys all correspondence between their case and that described in the narrative. This, however, is a difficulty which vanishes on a close examination. It is true, that Christians at the present day must be regarded as

having entered, at their baptism, within the sacred enclosure ; and there they must be reckoned to remain, unless they have forcibly broken out of it by open apostasy, and renunciation of the faith. But then, it is likewise true, that there are numbers in the vineyard who act as if they were not there. Their profession is a name, or little better than a name. Their hearts appear to be untouched, and their characters unchanged. The influence of the gospel surrounds them on all sides, but it never enters into their soul. In a certain sense it may be said, that they are in Christ ; but there seems little reason to hope that Christ is them. Now these persons are in a state, not indeed *precisely* the same as those who are not yet called and hired ; but they are in a state, which, in all essential respects, very nearly resembles it. Their hearts are not warmly engaged in the work. They are within the pale of the vineyard, but they remain nearly unconcerned in its labours. They are, indeed, on their Master's premises, but they are not employed about their Master's business. They form, as it were, a portion of his establishment, but they care little for *his* interests, and are without any true regard for their own. They are much too slothful to carry their thoughts forward to the time, when the industrious shall receive their reward. In short, to all human judgment, they are little better than mere unconcerned lookers on, and might almost as well be loitering without, in the market-place, among those who are waiting to be hired.

It is further true, that a wonderful change is sometimes found to take place among these idlers, before the day is over. The slothful and thoughtless members of the visible church are awakened to a sense of their duty towards the Master of the Vineyard, and to the necessity of labouring, lest their hire should be forfeited. And, in such instances, the case is, essentially, the same as if their hiring took place at the same moment when their habit of exertion commenced. Before that time, they were in the vineyard apparently to little purpose; and, to all effectual intents, it may be said, that their contract with the Master commences at the time when they begin to do his work in earnest.

1. In this sense it may be asserted, that some are hired early in the morning. In other words, their religious course commences at an early period of their lives. From children, they are not only in their Father's house and territory, but about their Father's work. They are *in* the vineyard, and they know and feel *why* they are there. They are active in the service of God. They fully acquiesce in the terms and conditions proposed by Him. Their toil is cheered by the habit of looking to Him for their reward, and by a full reliance on His justice, faithfulness, and bounty. Their delight is in the cultivation of the spot which is assigned to them for their labours. They bear cheerfully the heat and burden of the day; and they continue their covenanted toil until the night cometh, when the weary are at rest!

2. Others, again, are called at the third, the sixth,

the ninth, hours of the day. By which it may be understood, that the serious convictions of many do not commence till more advanced periods of life. And let the time be what it may, at which the earnest care for salvation begins, the parable is always so far applicable, that the persons thus awakened enter *then* effectually upon their work. What remains for them to do, that they diligently and faithfully perform. The hours may, sometimes, seem to drag on heavily and painfully. Weariness and faintness may come over their souls; and, as a hireling, they may often sigh for the welcome shadows of the evening. But the weak hands are strengthened, and the feeble knees are braced, by the assurance, that the Lord is not unmindful of them, and that their labour shall not be in vain.

3. There are some, however, who are not hired until the very last hour of the day. In other words, there are persons bred under the gospel, and professing its doctrines, or, at least, not openly renouncing them; and who, yet, seem to live in utter ignorance or disregard of Christian principles, till the shadows of death are gathering round their temples. During nearly the whole of their lives they have been within the vineyard, surrounded by scenes of usefulness and exertion, and encompassed by noble examples of integrity and self-devotion. But in the midst of all these incitements, they have remained slothful; or they have busied themselves with other matters; or they have, perhaps, been hindering, and even deriding, the toil of

the patient drudges around them ; that is, of the faithful labourers, who are anxious to *earn* their wages ; and thus have they continued till the hours of darkness are coming on. If no change of disposition occurs ; if no vigorous resolution stirs within them, and impels them to employ the remaining fragment of their time, what must be their fate ? Must they not be cast out from the vineyard, and have their portion among those who have never entered ? — or rather, a portion still more calamitous ; a portion imbittered by remorse, for the opportunities they have thrown away, and the reward which they have lost.

But from this state of despair, some are graciously saved even at the latest hour. They are awakened to a sense of their perilous condition. They are filled with shame and anguish by the thought, that they have so long been a useless burden on the earth. They see that the hour of recompense is near at hand, and that nothing awaits them, but the prospect of being sent empty away. The instant of their conviction, however, is that of their reformation. They strain every faculty, as if the toil of a whole life could be crowded into a single hour. They count themselves to have been, until that moment, no better than outcasts from the vineyard of the Lord ; strangers to his goodness, and traitors to his interest and honour. These feelings sustain them in the agony of their intense exertions to the last instant ; and they are then numbered among the faithful servants of the Lord. They enter

into his joy with hearts and affections wholly devoted to him, and qualified for the fullest exercise of his bounty.

And now, who will deny that the parable, thus explained, affords a powerful illustration of God's dealings with us, and of our hopes and duties? Does it not forcibly admonish us, that a life of spiritual sloth suspends all our interest in the blessings of the gospel, and may be almost said to banish us from the pale of the church, to have our portion among those who have never known the covenant of the Lord? Nay, does it not teach us, that the time which passes before we set our hand to our task, is a period of still more awful alienation from God? that a heavier judgment hangs over the slothful and faithless servants, than over them who never have been called to the labours of the vineyard? Does it not speak to us, both of the severity and the goodness of our heavenly Father? of his goodness which forbids us to despair, even when the shadows of evening begin to lengthen; of his severity, which will be as a consuming fire to all who wilfully abuse his forbearance?

1. That the gates of mercy are never shut against the sinner, till the day has closed upon him, is a blessed truth, which may be collected, not only from this parable, but from the whole tenor of God's word. In order to understand the righteousness of this proceeding, it is very necessary to remember, that though God is pleased, for Jesus Christ's sake, to make our works rewardable, our works, of them-

selves, can have no excellence sufficient to entitle them to reward at His hand. If, therefore, a recompense is given at all, we must not conclude that such recompense measures the value of our good deeds. If it measures any thing, besides the free bounty of the Giver, it is, rather, the internal character and disposition of the man, than the work he has actually done. If a principle of attachment and fidelity to God be once formed in the heart, the grand object of our probation has been obtained. And God, who sees into our heart, knows when this blessed consummation has taken place. He knows when the human soul is made meet for the inheritance that awaits the spirits of just men made perfect. In some instances, this fitness for the presence of God may be produced by a course of discipline comparatively short; in other cases, the trial must be protracted before it produces that effect. In some cases, the effect is never produced at all. In every case, God is the sole judge of such matters; and we may be assured that His dealings are framed with the most perfect regard both to justice and to mercy.

Consider what it is that the Scriptures proclaim to all — to him who has the prospect of lengthened years before him; and to him who is within an hour of eternity, but who never till then heard, or never regarded, the message of reconciliation and peace. Do they not declare to penitent sinners, of all ages and conditions, pardon and acceptance, as the free gift of God through Jesus Christ? Is it not their

testimony, that God hath given us eternal life, and that this life is in His Son? Do they not tell us, that the sentence was executed, at that awful moment when the Saviour cried out, "It is finished?" Do they not assure us, that an amnesty was then purchased for the whole world? that the honour of God's government was then vindicated by an act of unutterable love — an act which claims the most grateful and reposing confidence in the Divine goodness? What, then, would be the natural and proper effect of a full and unreserved belief and acceptance of this act of grace? Can we not imagine, that it might almost in an instant win the heart to a conformity with the Divine will? that conformity which is the peculiar character of heaven itself; and without which heaven could scarcely be a place of happiness, or even of repose. And what if this transformation of the soul should be effected at the moment before its flight from the body? Should we dare to pronounce, that the abodes of peace would be closed against it, or that it would be doomed to forfeit the bounty of the Eternal Master?

Be assured, it is the weakness and laxity of our belief in the Christian verities which delays and impedes this blessed transformation. It is the evil heart of unbelief which keeps the labourer idling in the vineyard. It is this which reduces him to the same condition with those who have never been called or hired; or, rather, to a condition infinitely more perilous, the condition of one who has been solemnly engaged to the service of God, and who,

yet, has neglected the service, and despised the recompense !

Happily for us, however, though we are weak, the Spirit of God is mighty in operation. With Him resides the mysterious plenitude of sovereignty and of grace. Without the slightest invasion of our moral freedom, without the smallest sacrifice of his own equity and righteousness, He can, at all times, arouse our faculties, and call them into action. Should it so please Him, He can, at the very last hour, command the spirit of slumber to depart from us, and enable us to trim our lamps, and to gird up our loins. Even when the night is beginning to gather round us, He can cause us to behold the excellency and brightness of the Saviour, and make His gospel shine into the darkest places of the soul. He can bid the germ of glory burst at once into life and vigour, in a way but faintly imaged by the sudden vegetation of a polar spring. He can change the loiterer into a willing and zealous servant, who would bear the heat and burden of the longest day (if the day were yet before him), and would remain faithful and industrious to the last. And thus the preparation for heaven may, by possibility, be complete, almost in an instant, even at the last moment of the very last hour.

2. There is, however, but little either of wisdom or piety in fixing our thoughts solely on what the Spirit of God *can* accomplish, in the fulness of His majesty and power. It is more to our purpose, to consider what He generally does accomplish, and

what are the usual modes of His operation ; and most certain it is, that the customary dealings of God afford no warrant to those who loiter in His vineyard, and imagine that they may remain wilfully idle till the approach of the eleventh hour.

We learn, indeed, that even to the latest period of the day the Lord waiteth to be gracious. But what security can this afford to us, who know not but that every hour, nay, every moment, may be our last ? And should the eleventh hour arrive, what warrant have we for presuming that it will be different from the hours which we have wasted before it ; or that it will bring with it any power or will to work, or any evidence of our title to reward ? The Scriptures are full of warnings against the dangers of spiritual sloth and procrastination. The spots of the leopard and the skin of the Ethiop, are the images by which they represent the obstinacy of inveterate and sinful habits ; and experience tells us, that the force of such habits is strengthened by every hour of delay. Nay, every moment of sluggish self-indulgence gives confirmation to evil principles and tempers, disables us for the performance of our baptismal vows, and does despite to the Spirit of Grace, which is perpetually striving against our corruptions. The labourer whose hours are wasted, is worse than inactive : he is every instant joining himself more closely in covenant with the enemies of his Master ; he is entering into a stricter league and agreement with hell itself ; and this agreement gains fresh strength by every deed done, and every

duty omitted, in accordance with its unholy stipulations.

3. Finally, then, I exhort you to meditate deeply and devoutly on this parable. The vineyard of the Lord is rich and fruitful; it is abundant in all things that can invite and animate our labours; and the bounty of the Master of the Vineyard gives both grace and force to the invitation. He calls upon us to cultivate those fruits which alone can nourish us up into everlasting life; and he offers a reward, which, by comparison and contrast, makes this world look like a barren wilderness. Let us, then, consider to which class of labourers do we belong? There are, it is to be presumed, in all Christian congregations, some who have long been diligent in the sacred enclosure to which their baptism has admitted them. With others, it is to be feared, the third, the sixth, the ninth hour, is passing away; and no symptoms of faithful exertion yet discernible! And with some, it is probable, the eleventh hour is approaching; and the night is coming on, in which no man can work; and they have their task yet to begin! To all, then, who may not have begun their labour in earnest, I would most anxiously address myself, whatever may be the hour of the day with them. I would beseech them, again and again, to reflect on the rashness, the insanity rather, of saying, "Since those at the eleventh hour were as liberally paid as those who commenced early, I will slumber on, and repose until the last. A single hour, or even the fragment of an hour, secures me

the full amount of my reward : why, then, should I bear the heat and burden of the day?"

It is impossible for words to give utterance to a more ungodly and sinful perversion of useful doctrine, than this. A more shocking abuse of the Divine mercy cannot issue from the corrupt heart of man. It is an abuse, which turns the grace of God into a license for the most inveterate selfishness — into an encouragement of that very depravity, against which the truth, as it is in Jesus, is perpetually at war. It is an abuse so shocking, that few, when pressed and questioned home, will venture openly to avow it: and yet who can doubt, that numbers are secretly cherishing the delusion in their hearts? I would therefore implore you to look this abomination in the face; and to drag it forth to the light, that you may see it in all its deformity!

What! shall we wait till the eleventh hour, when we know, not whether we shall ever see the third, or the sixth hour?

What! shall we refuse to work early, on the strength of a purpose to work when it is late — that is, on the strength of a purpose to commence our toil when all power and inclination to work may be gone — on the strength of a purpose to arouse and bestir ourselves when the spirit of slumber may be too heavy to be shaken off — on the strength of a purpose to strain every sinew, when long indulgence shall have unnerved the arm, and relaxed the knees, and made the whole heart faint and spiritless?

What! shall we indulge evil habits now, and cast

them off at some distant time? that is, shall we wait till the love of sin has become inveterate — a part of our very nature; and then begin the effort to cast sin away? Shall we delay resistance to the prince of this world, till his dominion has become fixed, and his chains riveted, and his very mark and number indelibly branded on our foreheads?

What! shall we wait for the saving operation of the Spirit of Grace, until we have grieved that Spirit, and alienated him, perhaps, from our hearts for ever? Shall we suffer the mansion of the Holy Ghost within us to be disfigured by whole years of pollution; to become the undisturbed den of every unclean and accursed thing; trusting that, in His own time, the Lord shall come to his temple, and forcibly drive our lusts from their strong holds and hiding-places?

It is impossible to hear these things stated, without trembling at their impiety: and yet it is impossible to survey human life without seeing that such impieties do often lurk in the obscure corners of the heart; and that, from thence, they send forth a savour of death over the lives and actions of multitudes, who, nevertheless, scruple not to call the Lord of Life their Master!

With this parable before me, I will not say that a death-bed repentance is in all cases an abomination before God; because, in so saying, I should limit the mercy of our Heavenly Father, which reserves to itself the power of stepping in at the last hour, or even at the latest moment of that hour; which

sometimes has visited the chamber of the dying, and till then impenitent, sinner ; and cheered his last agonies with whispers of pardon, and with visions of immortality. But this I will say — that for us to frame our life upon the resolution of repenting at our death, or at some *convenient season* before our death, is, of all invasions of God's sovereignty, perhaps, the most audacious : it is no less than venturing to seize on His prerogative—to usurp His discretion—to rush, as it were, into His secret counsels — to presume that the usual course of His dispensations will be suspended, in order to enlarge and protract our license of transgression. We all know what it is, in temporal matters, to tempt the providence of God, by omitting the precautions and the pains necessary to secure the success of our worldly pursuits ; and no one is sparing in his condemnation of such folly and rashness. But we shall find it a much more perilous and awful thing to tempt the grace of God, and to convert His long suffering into a pretence for our long-continued perseverance in iniquity !

Turn, then, to your appointed labours, this very moment, you who are wasting precious hours within the pale of the vineyard of your Lord and Master ! Turn, at once, to the work of your salvation ! Turn, with all the powers you possess, to the cultivation of your own immortal spirits ! Give yourselves up, with heart and hand, to the service of a Master who is bounteous beyond all human desert ; and who, unlike all earthly masters, can supply vigour and

spirit for the task which he enjoins ! It may be that the leaden hand of sloth lies heavy upon you. It may be that your powers seem to be fettered, as by the potency of some fatal enchantment. It may be that the head is sick, and the heart faint ; and that the heat and burden of the day are more than nature feels able to support. It may be that the weariness and painfulness of the present hour may have unbraced all your firmest resolves ; and that the remembrance of the reward is too weak to rally your dispersed and retreating energies. It may be, in short, that you have, for the moment, neither ear, nor memory, nor understanding, for the averment of the Apostle, that “ the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed.” All this may, indeed, be so. And yet, unless the death in trespasses and sins have invaded every region, and province, and strong-hold of the inward man ; unless, not only the right hand hath forgotten to toil, but the heart, as it were, hath ceased to beat, and the life-blood to be warm ; — unless these fatal signs have come on, the labourer must surely be able to call to mind, in the midst of his deadliest languor, that there is One who never fails to renew the strength of all who seek him with a deep and painful sense of their own infirmity. And so long as he retains this one blessed recollection, so long is he in safety ; so long he has within him the principle, at least, of health and vigour ; so long does there survive a hope that he may be enabled to spring forward to his task, and

to take his place among the trusty and unwearied servants of their Lord. Let him, therefore, embrace and hold fast this consoling thought. Let him lift up his soul to that power from whom cometh all strength and holiness; and, behold, his eyes shall be opened, and his force shall return to him, and the spirit of heaviness and slumber shall depart from him. He shall put on the garment of praise, and gird his loins with faithfulness and diligence, and finish his appointed labours with joy and thankfulness of heart.

Finally, let every one of us remember, that, whether we are in the morning, or the meridian of our day, or whether our sun is beginning to decline, the eleventh hour may, to us, be close at hand. In the midst of life we are in death. The very next instant may summon us before the Lord of the Vineyard. The young man, who is rejoicing in his youth, may be called to give an account of his work, long before the labourer whose temples are silvered, and whose back is bowed beneath the burden of many years. Above all things, let us keep steadily in mind, that, at the great day, "the Judge of all the earth shall do right;" and that, when that day arrives, all who have wilfully wrested and abused either this, or any other portion of his holy word, shall be driven out in nakedness and contempt from their refuge of lies, and shall seek, in vain, to hide themselves from the truth, which they once perverted or despised.

CHRISTOPHER BENSON, A.M.

On Scripture Difficulties. Twenty Discourses preached before the University of Cambridge, in the year 1822, at the Lecture founded by the Rev. John Hulse.

See also Vol. I. p. 325. of the Sunday Library.

GOD TEMPTING ABRAHAM, AND ABRAHAM'S
OBEDIENCE AND FAITH IN OFFERING
ISAAC, CONSIDERED.

PART I.

GENESIS, xxii. 1, 2.

It came to pass after these things, that God did tempt Abraham, and said unto him, Abraham : and he said, Behold, here I am. And he said, Take now thy son, thine only son, Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah ; and offer him there for a burnt-offering upon one of the mountains that I will tell thee of.

GREAT was thy faith, O Abraham, and worthy indeed wert thou to bear the name and the honours of the father of the faithful ! To bring thy son as an offering to the altar of the Lord, and there to lift up the knife to slay thy son, thine only son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovedst, the child of thine and Sarah's age, the child of hope, the child of promise, the child of God ; to bring that son as a victim to the shrine of the Almighty, and there " to lay thine hand upon the lad " to take away his life ; in all this there was an evidence of such undeviating obedience to the commandment of Heaven, a testimony of such firm and unalterable faith, as few of thy sons, however nearly resembling thee in these

excellent gifts, have happily been called upon to bear. It was such a trial to human wisdom and to human feelings; it was such a trial to religious principle and to parental tenderness: to shed the blood of him to whom thou hadst communicated his being, seemed so to contravene the very rudiments of the law of nature; to cut off out of the land of the living him upon whom rested all the promises of blessing upon the human race, seemed so to render the accomplishment of those promises impossible, that nothing but an irresistible conviction of the reality of a commandment to do the deed — a commandment originating in Him whose will is law — could either have suggested, or sanctified, or carried thee through the scene.

Thus far all agreed. That the trial of Abraham was difficult, beyond the difficulties to which men are subject in the ordinary temptations of life, is universally allowed. But from this point, the line of separation between the children of belief and the children of infidelity begins, and grows wider and wider at every step, as they proceed in the discussion of those principles, upon which the solution of the controversy must ultimately rest.

The children of belief and of Abraham, taking for an ensample the dependence of their forefather upon the simple and unadulterated word of God, believe, upon the authority of Moses, that the patriarch acted upon a sure and ascertained commandment from the Lord; and therefore was justified in his awful deed. They rest, in the second place, upon

the inspiration of St. Paul, for their information with regard to the motives by which the patriarch was influenced to obedience, and the means by which he reconciled the seeming contrariety of the two declarations he had received; namely, that Isaac should be slain in sacrifice, and yet live to become the father of the promised seed. They hold it to be a faithful saying, that Abraham accounted God to be able to raise up his slain and offered son even from the dead; and thus do they think that they remove from his mind every apprehension of inconsistency between the commandment to sacrifice, and the promise to bless his son. Supported, lastly, by the united assertions of the prophet and the apostle, they maintain that because Abraham believed the power, and submitted himself meekly to the recognised will of God, his obedience in that faith was rightly counted to him for righteousness in the eye of Eternal Mercy, though he was himself far, no doubt, from being perfect in personal righteousness, when weighed in the balance of impartial justice. For God, that chargeth even the angels with folly, must needs be supposed to have beheld enough of impurity and imperfection, even in the character of faithful Abraham, to have blotted him out for ever from the book of independent merit.

These are the arguments of them that believe. The children of unbelief, on the other hand, trusting to the conclusions of human reason, as drawn only from their own general principles of moral obligation, and their own philosophical systems of religious

faith, maintain, that all these reasonings are feeble and inconclusive. Of the tenderness of Abraham's heart, and of the piety of his intention, and of the struggle which there must have been in his mind between the sense of duty and desire, they express no positive or considerable degree of doubt. But they argue, that he ought to have allowed no mode of Divine communication to prevail over his better feelings, and bring him to the commission of what they deem a manifest act of paternal cruelty. That in Abraham's conduct we have a powerful example of the triumph of what was supposed to be the dictate of religious principle over the yearnings of nature and a parent's love, they admit. But they hold, at the same time, that the triumph was gained, rather by an easy credulity than a well-grounded belief, and that it is, consequently, an example rather of an holy weakness of understanding, than a reasonable strength of faith. No evidence, however clear, could, in their opinion, have justified any individual father upon earth in believing that a commandment to slay his own and his only son, proceeded from the pitiful Father of all in heaven; or that his obedience, in consequence of that belief, would be considered and received as an acceptable service. Upon these considerations they conclude, that such a commandment is altogether unfit to find a place amongst the recorded dispensations of God to man, and such obedience equally undeserving of those repeated commendations with which it has been loaded both by prophets and apostles. They

would praise the patriarch indeed themselves ; but with allowance and with judgment : and because they think it alike incongruous for God to require, and man to perform, the rite of human sacrifice, they commend the motive, but condemn both the deed of Abraham, and the book of Genesis.

In these remarks we have the substance of the whole objection against the credibility and propriety of the fact in its literal interpretation. The commandment to Abraham to offer Isaac his son is censured, as unworthy of the holiness of God to give ; unworthy of the wisdom of Abraham, as a man, to believe ; still more unworthy of his tenderness and duty, as a father, to obey ; and, most of all, unworthy of being represented, as it is represented in Genesis, as the cause of that pre-eminent blessing, which God so solemnly pronounced upon the patriarch.

1. If such, indeed, were a true representation of the case, I know not with what semblance of reason we could venture to recommend the writings of Moses or of St. Paul to the perusal and meditation of Christians. But why is the command to be considered unworthy of God to give ? Who are they that thus presume to determine the limits within which the will of the Almighty must move ; and what are the rules by which they pretend to judge of the propriety of his commands ? They are men, mere mortal and fallible men, who engage in this fearful responsibility, and their only ground of argument is some seeming incongruity between the com-

mand and what they are pleased to term "the eternal and immutable fitness of things." They tell us that the obligations of morality are "founded in nature," that they are "antecedent to the consideration of a Deity, and independent of any divine command."* Where theories like these have been once adopted into the mind; where the will of the Creator is thus bound down within the narrow space prescribed to it by the irresistible regulations of a pre-existing Nature, whose laws are assumed to have been made known with such certainty and fulness to man, that he cannot in any instance mistake the line of conduct they proclaim as necessary to be pursued; where standards of morality like these are maintained, it is easy to perceive that the Omnipotent himself cannot be allowed to step beyond the bounds assigned to him by his creatures, nor to establish a single ordinance which the moral philosopher would deem inconsistent with his pre-established opinions upon what, under similar circumstances, it would have been proper for a mere man to ordain. But we, who have been taught to reverence the Creator as at once the Lord and the Author of that nature to which the creed of these philosophists would place him in an entire and unavoidable subjection, can never consent to a doctrine which would rob him of his liberty, reduce his power, and bring down the glories of his Godhead to the same level with our own dependent insignificance and inability. We, who believe that the will of the Deity is both the

* Chubb's Case of Abraham.

origin and the criterion of what is morally right, and that he is the Lord, and not the subject of the fitness of things, and that the only invariable rule by which we can safely assume that he acts, is the happiness and welfare of the whole universe over which he presides; we, who submit to the principles of a moral philosophy like this, must freely and humbly confess, that there is no command which, antecedently to a consideration of the particular circumstances under which it is issued, and the purposes it is intended to serve, can be decidedly pronounced to be impossible for God to give. As a general proposition, it is universally and undeniably true, that he never will at any time, or upon any occasion, require the obedience of an individual to that which may be absolutely inconsistent with his own eternal welfare, or the general good of the universal creation. But acknowledging, as we do, the wisdom of the Lord, we must acknowledge also that there are many things which he may see to be beneficial to the world, yet whose usefulness our ignorance is unable to appreciate. Believing also, as we do, in the omnipotence of Jehovah, we cannot but believe, at the same time, that his power will ever superintend and control the consequences of those commands his holiness has uttered, and obviate the evils which would naturally have followed, had they been only the commandments of a being incapable of regulating the works and ways of men. It is in vain, therefore, for the deist to urge the impossibility of the command to offer Isaac having

proceeded from God, merely because it was a command for a father to slay his son. For if every precept which is an exception to a general law is to be regarded as in every instance demonstrating the immorality of the action required, we shall be compelled, upon the same principle, to condemn all systems of human legislation which authorise the ministers of justice to shed human blood, as guilty of sanctioning a violation of the commandment against murder. But the real truth evidently is, that every precept must be viewed and judged with reference to every surrounding event, and every connected consideration. The propriety or impropriety, therefore, of this particular command to Abraham is to be estimated, not from its abstract nature, but from an examination into the situation in which the parties stood, and the various purposes which were intended to be served.

2. Now in turning to this less abstruse and more profitable investigation, we shall find a variety of reasons which, whether they be separately or collectively weighed, are fully sufficient to teach us the presumption of that sweeping censure with which the enemies of revelation have condemned the mode in which Abraham was so painfully required to manifest his obedience to the will of Heaven.

1. The first of these is, that, judging from the issue of the transaction, it is clearly to be inferred, that it never was the purpose of the Almighty that the command should be carried into actual execution. Abraham “came to the place which God had

told him of, and Abraham built an altar there, and laid the wood in order, and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar upon the wood. And Abraham stretched forth his hand and took the knife to slay his son." * In every thing he had obeyed the voice of the Lord, not only in the essential act which was prescribed, but in all the minuter particulars which were enjoined. He had taken "his son, his only son Isaac, whom he loved." He had journeyed into the appointed land; he had come to the mountain which God had told him of; and that, in the intentions of his heart, he had already offered up his son as a burnt-offering to the Lord, his uplifted hand is an irresistible proof. It is to mark this perfection in the patriarch's obedience, and not merely in the simplicity of ancient narrative, that the sacred historian has so circumstantially related the particulars of the scene; and it is to demonstrate to every succeeding generation the full and complete submission of Abraham to God's will, that the Father of Mercy had thus far withheld the interposition of his voice. But all these purposes were now answered. Scepticism itself could no longer doubt the patriarch's readiness to obey; and therefore it was that, at this awful moment, "the angel of the Lord called unto him out of heaven, and said, Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing that thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, from me." † The end was accomplished, the obedience

* Gen. xxii. 9, 10.

† Gen. xxii. 11, 12.

shown ; and the voice of the Holy One relieved the suspense of his faithful servant, and revealed to him the true object of a requisition so contrary to his expectations, and feelings, and hopes.

2. Here, then, we are introduced to another remark, which may be urged in justification of this singular command. It was uttered to make trial of the disposition of him upon whom it was laid. “It came to pass, after these things, that God did tempt Abraham.”* It was the last in the series of those memorable communications from Heaven, by which his whole life had been so wonderfully marked, and in every one of which he had uniformly conducted himself as one who trusted not to his own understanding, nor guided himself by the dictates of his own passions and propensities, but leaned entirely and meekly upon the Lord. Already had he quitted his country, and his kindred, and his father’s house, and gone out, “not knowing whither he went †,” in mere reliance upon a promise of God, the fulfilment of which he was never to be permitted personally to experience.‡ Already had he relied upon the simple assurance of the Lord, and believed, though childless §, in the multitude of his seed, and the blessings they should inherit, and the land they should hereafter possess. Already had he not staggered at the deadness of his own body, and of Sarah’s womb, and was rewarded by the gift of a son in his old age. || Yet “after all these things,” after so many trials, and so many

* Gen. xxii. 1. † Heb. xi. 8. ‡ Gen. xv. 13—17

§ Gen. xii. 14—18.

|| Gen. xviii.

triumphs, after having been proved and praised in so many various and difficult scenes, after having talked with God, and entertained the angels, and interceded successfully with the world's just Judge*, it still pleased the Lord to add one other temptation, before he should finally and irrevocably confirm to his person and his posterity the great glory of becoming the blessing of all the nations of the earth. That trial is the subject of our argument, and it consisted in a command of all others the most arduous for a father's tenderness to pass through unblamed—a command to offer up his only son. To those who oppose the propriety of the circumstance, the trial appears at once to have been both cruel and needless; and we readily allow that had it been proposed to any ordinary individual, or as a mode of informing the Deity himself of the disposition and feelings of this eminent believer, it would have been perhaps unnecessarily rigid, and more than mercifully severe. But he was no common individual from whom so peculiar a demonstration of submission was required. He was a being to be selected and separated from mankind as the friend of God; and to him, and to his posterity for his sake, were to be confirmed the best temporal and spiritual promises of the Most High. Hence it became necessary that every succeeding generation should feel thoroughly convinced that he, for whom so much was to be done, was worthy of the distinction he received; and satisfactorily to establish his title to this praise, no trial, however arduous,

* Gen. xviii.

can be imagined too severe. For with all the difficulty which attended the command, and all the reluctance which Abraham, as a father, must have experienced in forming the resolution of obedience, we still hear men murmuring at the choice of his descendants as God's peculiar people, and condemning the mercy of the Almighty as exceeding the limits of legitimate favour. What then would have been the violence of their censures, had the temptation of the patriarch been simple and mild, and had his obedience been less painfully called forth, it will be easy for any one to conceive. Had there been nothing that was uncommon in the trial to which he was exposed, men would have justly wondered at the greatness of those extraordinary blessings he obtained, and judged the measure of his reward to have been infinitely disproportioned to the merit of his faith. Instead of urging upon us, as they now do, the nature of the command as one it was impossible to obey, they would have declared that, seeing neither any singularity in his obedience, nor any superiority in his faith, they could not but deem the preference he received to have been arbitrary and unreasonable, founded upon no pre-eminent merit, and conferred upon a being distinguished by no virtue beyond his brethren around. In a word, had Abraham been commanded only to bring the "calves of his lips," and not the fruit of his loins; or had he been required to offer up only the sacrifice of a broken and a contrite heart, and not the sacrifice of his only and his beloved son, we should have been

at a loss to explain, or, at least, we should have been able but very inadequately to account for, that unabated kindness, and those perpetual mercies, which his children were so long permitted to enjoy, amidst all their desertions of God's service, and all their violation of his laws. Every particle diminished from the severity of Abraham's temptation would have rendered it more difficult for believers to vindicate the favour which God showed to him in his posterity.

Such are the reasons which induce us to think that the command to offer Isaac as a burnt-offering to the Lord was not unworthy of the wisdom of the holiness of that Lord to give. His wisdom is vindicated, because, as Abraham was to be made the channel of irrevocable blessings, and exceeding great and precious promises to mankind, it was expedient that his obedience should be both most arduous in its nature, and most signal in its display ; in order that mankind might have no reasonable cause for arraigning the justice of the glorious reward which his obedience obtained. The holiness of God is also sufficiently vindicated from any accusation of cruelty in the peculiar command which he selected for this purpose, because it is evident from the issue, that it was never his intention that it should be carried into actual execution. God gave the command to try Abraham, because for the satisfaction of future generations it was most necessary that he should be most severely tried ; and he withheld from him to the last his determination to prevent the fulfilment of the command, because it was equally necessary

for us to know, that the trial was in truth and reality, and not in semblance and imagination alone.

These are conclusions deduced from the narrative of Moses; and here we might stop the progress of our enquiries, content with the light they afford. But the dispensation of the gospel, under which we have the happiness to live, contributes so many additional considerations to elucidate the reason why this mode of trial in particular was chosen, that, however familiarly they may be known, we cannot be permitted to leave the subject incomplete by their omission.

3. We may remark, then, as a third method of establishing the propriety of this command, that there is such a remarkable resemblance between the circumstances which accompanied the offering up of Isaac, and those which are related of the crucifixion of Christ, that we are naturally and almost unavoidably led to regard them as intended to be the type and antitype of each other. Each individual concerned was an only and a beloved son of his father. Each was doomed by his father to be made a sacrifice. Each bore upon his own shoulders the wood upon which he was to suffer. Each willingly gave up the life he was required to resign, and “as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so opened he not his mouth.” Each was counted dead in the sight of men, yet each was raised again, and returned unto those he had left. Each was the heir of the promise by descent, and to each the promise has been fulfilled. The seed of each has been “multiplied as the stars of heaven, and as the

sand which is upon the sea-shore, and in their seed have all the nations of the earth been blessed." It is impossible to consider these resemblances, and not to perceive how strictly they correspond with each other. What then could be more proper or wise, than that God should choose that particular mode of trial for the patriarch, which, whilst by its severity it proved to every succeeding generation the readiness and the fulness of his obedience and faith, would at the same time, by its nature, have a direct tendency to convince those who might live after the Messiah had appeared and suffered, that both the manner of his appearance and sufferings had been thus typified and foreseen? This prefiguration, then, of the sacrifice of Christ, which may be so distinctly and decidedly recognised in the offering up of Isaac to the Lord, and which could not have been unknown to the omniscience of Him who gave the command, would seem, when added to the other considerations we have urged, to account not only for the severity of the duty which was required from Abraham, but almost for every circumstance by which it was accompanied and marked. As a type of the Messiah, the command to offer Isaac was most fit to be selected.

Enough, I trust, has now been said to justify the ways of God to man, and to show that this command was not unworthy of the holiness of God to give. But it still remains for us to justify the obedience of man to God. We have still to show how Abraham, to whom some of the points upon which we have dwelt must have been unknown.

could yet perceive that the command was one which it was neither unworthy of his reason as a man to believe, nor of his tenderness as a father to obey. This, therefore, must be the subject of a following lecture.

In the mean time, I would most earnestly exhort all, and especially those who are entering upon the investigations of moral philosophy, to be peculiarly jealous of the nature of those principles which they allow to become the fundamental principles of their acts or judgment. Virtue consists in obedience to the known will of God, and in nothing else. It may be right enough for those who have no revelation of the Divine will, to resort to those probable rules of right which reason propounds; and it is always our bounden duty to reject every pretended revelation which lays down such general precepts for the regulation of our conduct in life, as contradict the feelings of nature and of conscience. It is upon this ground that we fearlessly reject the scriptures of the Mahometan, because, whilst they are unsupported by any solid external proof, they are internally condemned by the evidence of a variety of ceremonial and moral precepts, whose immediate effect, if carried into universal practice, would be to destroy, instead of promoting, the happiness of mankind. But where the truth and divinity of a religion, like that of the gospel to which we bow, is sanctioned by almost every kind of testimony which imagination could desire, and where its statutes and its ordinances are altogether merciful, and holy, and right, we should never

permit such a compact and solid body of external and internal proof to be borne down by the difficulty we may experience in explaining the propriety of a particular command to some particular individual, which was never intended to be made a guide or an example to others. Here it will be right to remember man's weakness and ignorance ; and here it will be right to reverence God's wisdom and power. But those who have already embraced some invariable definition of right and wrong, can never be in a capacity to act thus. Whether their standard be laid in the general consequences of actions which they cannot always appreciate, or in the eternal fitness of things, which they seldom, if ever, understand, or in some supposed natural obligations of morality antecedent to every consideration of a Deity and his will ; by which ever of these philosophical rules they presume universally to judge of the operations and commands of God, it is more than possible that they may often judge foolishly, and censure in vain. Doubtless the Almighty can never really violate one single principle which philosophy approves ; but it is not unreasonable to allow, that there may be cases, especially in the brief histories of more ancient ages, where *we* may err in the application of the correctest principles. Above all, therefore, it becomes us, in the outset of life, to be cautious in the admission of such universal principles as, if once imbibed into the mind as the infallible criteria of things human and divine, may lead us to reject even our religion, and reprove even our God.

GOD TEMPTING ABRAHAM, AND ABRAHAM'S
OBEDIENCE AND FAITH IN OFFERING
ISAAC, CONSIDERED.

PART II.

HEB. xi. 17, 18, 19.

By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac : and he that had received the promises offered up his only-begotten son, of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called : accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead ; from whence also he received him in a figure.]

TO contemplate things fairly, and to form a correct and unobjectionable opinion, especially when the morality of human actions is concerned, it is necessary to view the subject not merely according to its abstract qualities, but also in its actual relations. For as every general principle is susceptible of a variety of limitations, we know not in what manner, or to what extent, that particular principle which is involved in our enquiry ought to be modified, until we have examined it in its bearings upon the question in which we are engaged.

Pursuing this course in the preceding lecture, we arrived at a conclusion directly the reverse of that which the deist has embraced, upon the command

by which Abraham was required to offer up his only son. We saw, from the issue of the transaction, that it never was the purpose of the Most High that the sacrifice of a human being should be carried into actual execution. We saw, from the narrative of Moses, that the primary object of the command was to try the patriarch in the severest manner; and from a comparison of the circumstances of the transaction with the crucifixion of Christ, we were unavoidably led to suppose that a secondary and not less important object was, to prove to those who should live under the gospel dispensation, that this great event had been typified, and consequently both foreseen and fore-ordained. The inference which we ultimately drew from these considerations was a vindication of the propriety of the command, as one which never could be unworthy of being given by that omniscient God, before whose eye every benefit and consequence which would result from it must have been completely revealed.

But there is not one of these observations which Abraham could have distinctly made for himself, before he had obeyed the injunction of the Lord, and “stretched forth his hand to slay his son.” That his obedience and faith were in reality most severely tried, he would inevitably feel; but he could have no certain knowledge that the command was intended *only* as a trial, nor could he be at all aware, that what was so solemnly required and circumstantially directed, would be so suddenly interrupted in its progress by the interposition of the heavenly

voice. He could have little hope that the command would be recalled ; and still less can he be imagined to have had that clear insight into its connection with the death of the Messiah, which, in these later ages, we so joyfully recognise. When, therefore, we proceed, as is the purpose of the present discourse, to show the propriety of his obedience to the words he had heard, we must reason either from principles altogether different, or, at least, very differently modified, from those which have been hitherto the foundation of our argument. I mark this distinction the more carefully, because the confusion which has prevailed, from the want of a due separation between the different objections which may be made to this incident, and the different modes in which they are to be answered, has been one great cause of the failure of divines in producing the conviction they desired. The propriety of giving the command, and the propriety of obeying it, are two separate propositions, and whenever they are confounded together in our enquiries, neither will our ideas be clear, nor our arguments conclusive.

Now, in endeavouring to ascertain what might be the considerations which influenced the patriarch to an act of such painful obedience, we may lay it down as an admitted principle, that he was fully authorised to fulfil both this and every other command, however repugnant to his feelings and thoughts, provided he could be satisfactorily assured that it really proceeded out of the mouth of God. God is the

universal and all-mighty Governor of the world. By his wisdom all possibilities are foreseen, and by his power all events are regulated. To every one, therefore, who acknowledges that the Lord is King, and that he ruleth irresistibly over the affairs of men, and who believes, at the same time, that his mercy is over all his works, and that justice and righteousness are the habitation of his seat : to every one who thus thinks of the Deity, it must be evident that he has but to know the will of God in order to fulfil it. Such unquestionably was the faith of Abraham. Looking up to the Holy One that inhabiteth eternity, as the mighty, but yet merciful Father of his creatures upon earth, he deemed that what he had called him to perform must be right to perform, and could be intended for nothing but kindness in reality, however harsh in its apparent tendency. What then were the grounds of Abraham's conviction upon these points? How knew he that it was indeed the Lord who had spoken? How could he reconcile the seeming inconsistency between the previous promise and the present command; or persuade himself that he with whom "there is neither variableness, nor shadow of turning," could require him to violate the prohibition of shedding human blood? These are the questions we are to answer, and in order to give them a full and a fair consideration, it will be expedient to examine, first, the external, and, secondly, the internal evidences of the divine origin of the command to Abraham. For the only true way of preserving the

impartiality of the reasoning powers, and guarding against a precipitate or erroneous judgment upon any disputed point, is never to enter into any minute investigation of its nature and propriety, until we have, first of all, given a due attention to its positive and external proof. When the force of the latter has been once correctly appreciated, we shall then be able to perceive what is the degree of moderation or boldness with which we may examine its internal fitness and consistency.

I. In the first place, then, we may observe, with regard to the *external* evidences of the divine origin of the command, that it is absolutely inconceivable how Abraham could for a moment be deceived or in doubt. Familiarised for the space of more than twenty years to a series of successive communications with a Being who claimed to himself the inflexible name and the awful attributes of Jehovah, he could not possibly be ignorant of the form and manner of his appearance. One professing to be the Lord had originally commanded him to quit his native country, and his father's land, and had promised him the land of Canaan for the possession of his posterity.* One professing to be the same Lord had established with him an everlasting covenant, and instituted the right of circumcision as its sign.† In the plains of Mamre‡ had the same Lord appeared unto him, and talked with him of Sodom and Gomorrah's wickedness, and told him of Sodom and

* Gen. xii. and xiii.

† Gen. xvii.

‡ Gen. xviii.

Gomorrah's destruction. The promises of a blessing to his seed, and of seed from Sarah, the commandment to leave Hagar to her fate*, and to offer up Isaac his son, were all pronounced in the name of the same God, and obeyed by Abraham as proceeding from the same authority. After such various and repeated intercourse with this mysterious personage, and after having heard his words upon so many different occasions, his must have been a treacherous memory indeed, if it could not recollect the sound of the voice which had so often directed his actions, and controlled his thoughts; and his must have been a weak and unsound judgment indeed, if it could not distinguish between the signs of a real and a pretended communication from his frequent counsellor. But not only was Abraham, by the constant recurrence of these interviews with this awful Being, enabled to recognise his features, and perceive his footsteps; but he was also in a capacity to conclude, without hesitation and doubt, that they were the footsteps and features of the all-powerful, all-merciful, and all-righteous Jehovah himself. For the son which this Lord had declared that Sarah should conceive, his power had enabled her to bring forth in her old age. The judgment which he had pronounced upon the lustful cities of the plain, his righteousness had executed before the morning's dawn; and the support and kindness which he had promised to the hated Hagar, his mercy had fulfilled, even in the

* Gen. xxi. 12.

wilderness, and without delay. All his words had been accomplished, all his predictions verified, as far as the time and opportunity would permit ; and amidst so many wise and wonderful works, it would have been most strange had Abraham imagined the Being with whom he conversed to be any other than that mighty King, whose vengeance is upon the wings of the wind, and who maketh his ministers a flaming fire ; who turneth the standing water into a wilderness, and calleth for water-springs out of a dry ground ; who maketh also the barren woman to keep house, and to be a joyful mother of children. Where testimonies like these had been given, it is clear that he could be doubtful neither with regard to the identity, nor the nature of Him, who had demanded the sacrifice of his son, so far at least as the external evidences were concerned. Had the command therefore been merely of an ordinary kind, it is clear that no one would, for a moment, have imagined that Abraham was deceived in supposing that it was God himself who had spoken. He had sufficient proof both of the person and power of the speaker, to preclude every probability of error. Whether that probability of error was in any degree affected by the extraordinary nature of what he was required to perform ; whether the internal unfitness and impropriety of the command to sacrifice his son, were not sufficient to counterbalance every external argument in favour of its divine origin, is what we are called upon, in the second place, to investigate.

II. Now, it must necessarily be allowed, that

wherever a command is absolutely immoral, and altogether unworthy of being either enjoined or performed, there is no degree of external evidence which can outweigh the internal presumption against its divinity, or give us any reasonable satisfaction that it came from God. But before we venture to pronounce upon the immorality of a command, it may become us not only to consider well the relation in which it stands to each connected being and event, but also to examine with the utmost diligence whether we are acquainted with the whole circumstances of the case, and whether there be not reason to suspect that the Deity may have been influenced by motives unknown or incomprehensible to our limited understandings. In every instance this is our duty as dependent and created beings; and the diffidence with which we pronounce our judgment ought always to be proportioned to the weight of the external evidence. It were most unnatural to suppose, that God would ever allow the positive proofs of any revelation to amount to so high a degree of assurance as to be incapable of being rationally rejected, were that revelation itself essentially repugnant to his will. Wherever, therefore, the external evidence of a divine revelation or command is found to be of such an irresistible nature that, when taken alone, it would bear down every prejudice of unbelief, there we may fairly presume that the command did most probably proceed from God; and in consequence of that probability, we ought to be particularly jealous in the prosecution of our reasonings into

its internal credibility. We ought to make every admissible allowance, and try every possible supposition by which it may be reconciled to our pre-established opinions. Since then, we have already found how strong and irresistible must have appeared to Abraham the external marks of the divine origin of the command to offer up his son, it is evident, that in estimating its moral propriety, we are bound to be peculiarly diffident in our conclusions, and authorised to give its full weight to every consideration which he might adopt to justify his obedience.

1. The first difficulty, then, which the patriarch would feel would be this, that the command required a sacrifice of blood: and the first consideration which might tend to remove this difficulty, would be the reflection, that sacrifices of blood had already been approved by the Deity in some of the most memorable instances, and some of the most holy individuals whom the world had ever seen. In a sacrifice of blood had Abel been accepted, and through a sacrifice of blood had Noah obtained a renewal of the blessings and covenant of God. To Abraham himself also had a sacrifice of blood been already appointed as a means of assuring him of the fulfilment of the promises which he had received. “Whereby shall I know that I shall inherit this land?” said Abraham unto the Lord God.* And the Lord God “said unto him, Take me an heifer of three years old, and a

* Gen. xv. 8.

she-goat of three years old, and a ram of three years old, and a turtle-dove and a young pigeon. And he took unto him all these. And it came to pass, that when the sun went down and it was dark, behold a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp that passed between those pieces. And in the same day the Lord made a covenant with Abraham, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates." Thus had God enjoined upon him the privation of animal life, as a religious service, and thus had his obedience been rewarded by the miraculous acceptance of his sacrifice, and a solemn repetition of the temporal blessings he desired, and an additional confirmation of the covenant of the Almighty with his seed. Why, then, should he not suppose that God might now also require from him a similar but still more awful sacrifice of blood, as the last testimony of submission to his will, and a final preliminary to some still more extensive blessings, and some still better covenant? Human and animal life are alike at the disposal of their almighty Maker, and he has the same authority over both, and can with equal justice make the thunders of heaven, or the sons of Adam, the instruments of his wisdom and power. Human and animal life are also alike by nature withdrawn from the sword of man; and, without an express or implied permission from the Lord, we should have no more right to lift our hand against the firstlings of our flocks, than against the fruit of the womb. Why, then, should Abraham

consider it as impossible for God to require this latter also as well as the former service from his servant? In his own ineffable kindness, God had promised that in the patriarch, and in his son, should all the nations of the earth be blessed; but in his own ineffable wisdom he had withheld from him all knowledge as to the means by which that blessing was to be communicated to the world. What were the actions they were to perform, what the trials they were to undergo, and what the pains or the sufferings they were to endure, had never been clearly either intimated or revealed. The performance, then, of this very command to sacrifice his only and his beloved son, might, perhaps, be the very condition upon which the accomplishment of this universal blessing to mankind had been suspended by Heaven. Had there been any difference in the manner in which the command had been uttered, to induce him even to suspect that it did not proceed from the same source with the previous promises, then, indeed, the singularity and severity of the trial might have justified him in refusing to fulfil its painful duties. But we have seen that both the promise and the command proceeded from the same Being, and were uttered by the same voice, and that this voice was the voice of the great Jehovah himself. The same testimony of his senses, the same conclusions of his reason, and the same lessons of long and repeated experience which confirmed to the patriarch the divine origin of the one, confirmed to him also the divine origin of the other. If, therefore, he

had refused to believe and obey the command, he must have begun at the same time to doubt and disbelieve the promise he had received, and, suspecting one by one the truth of all his preceding revelations, have been led at length to suppose, what is the most unnatural of all suppositions, that the wise and merciful Governor of the world had permitted one of the most faithful of his worshippers to be deceived through the whole course of his life by a series of apparent divine communications, the strength of whose evidence it would have been irrational to resist. Since, then, the external proofs of the divine origin of the command were not only convincing, but the very same which had accompanied so many undoubted revelations of the Almighty to Abraham, and since it was possible that the happiness of the whole human race might, in the counsels of the Most High, have been connected with the sacrifice of Isaac, Abraham was evidently justified in yielding to those proofs, notwithstanding the repugnance between this particular command and God's general laws. For where the welfare of the world is involved, the life of any single individual may most fitly be demanded as the equivalent.

Here, then, we have the reasons which might induce the piety of the patriarch to offer up even a sacrifice of human blood. He knew not the whole of the case, and was therefore bound in humility and faith to be guided by the external evidence, and not presumptuously to set up the conclusions of his ignorance as an indisputable criterion of the

fitness of the sacrifice required. The arguments, however, which then prevailed with him can never again be permitted to prevail with any other individual. Since the days of Abraham, the wickedness of mankind, and the interested cruelty of idolatrous priests, have deluged the altars of their horrid deities with such a profusion of human blood, that it has pleased the Almighty expressly and unequivocally to forbid the repetition of the rite, upon any future occasion or under any possible pretence. "Every abomination to the Lord which he hateth had the Canaanites done unto their gods; for even their sons and their daughters had they burnt in the fire to their gods."* Such was the iniquity of their general worship; and to prevent for ever the encouragement of the rite, and separate the service of the true God from the depraved institutions of idolatry, Moses was commanded most solemnly to enjoin the Israelites to take heed unto themselves, and "not do so unto the Lord their God." By that injunction, therefore, we, and all to whom the oracles of God may hereafter be intrusted, are still, and must for ever, be bound. The sacrifice of a human being, however attested, can never be either rationally believed or innocently obeyed by us; not, however, so much because it is contrary to our reason to suppose it possible to require it, but because it is in direct contradiction to a preceding revelation of the will of Heaven, and, therefore, we are sure that it

* Deut. xii. 31.

never will be required. But before the trial of Abraham by the command to offer up his son, it was not so. We have no record whatever to lead us to suppose that Moloch and his horrid rites had ever at that time been practised, or even known. Nor is there the smallest vestige of any previous declaration from God himself upon the subject. The command to offer up his son came not, therefore, to Abraham, as it would to any Christian father, in the shape of a command to do that which had been profaned to the service of idols, and prohibited by the word of God: but it came to him as an awful and mysterious novelty, a revelation whose reasons were too lofty for him to understand, but whose evidence was too indisputable for his humility to resist. Such are the grounds upon which, whilst we vindicate the obedience of the patriarch himself, we would forbid the obedience of any other individual, and prevent superstition from encouraging itself in the practice of any frivolous or inhuman rites. And this distinction it is most necessary to observe, because the strongest objections of the Deist are founded upon the implied sanction which they suppose the example of Abraham to afford to the delusions of mistaken piety in deviating from the commandments of the moral law.

2. We have now shown what was the strength of that evidence which induced Abraham to believe that God had spoken to him, and by what arguments he might have been convinced that it was not impossible for God to require from him a human sacri-

fice. But there still remains another difficulty to be removed. Those very promises, for the fulfilment of which we suppose that Abraham might have imagined the sacrifice of his son to be the appointed means, were, apparently at least, in direct contradiction to such an idea. For Isaac had not only been declared to be that seed in whom "all the families of the earth were to be blessed;" but it had also been promised that Sarah should be "a mother of nations," and that "kings of people should be of her." Yet, besides Isaac, Sarah had no other child; and Isaac as yet had neither wife nor son. Where, then, if Isaac was offered up unto the Lord, would be the fulfilment of this part of the promise to Sarah's seed? This is the difficulty, and we have the answer to it in the words of St. Paul. Abraham "accounted that God was able to raise up Isaac even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure." In a figure Isaac had indeed been received from the dead, when begotten by him, whose strength through age had become weakness, and born of her whose womb had been shut up even from her very youth. Yet even under all those discouragements, Abraham* "staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief;" but, being strong in faith, "considered not his own body now dead, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb." Even "against hope he believed in hope; and being fully persuaded that what God had promised he was able

* See Rom. chap. iv.

to perform," the performance of the promise rewarded his confidence, and the birth of Isaac, when nature and expectation were almost gone, gave new vigour to his faith, and prepared him for the endurance of still greater trials. Those trials came with the command to offer up that son. But the belief in God's power, which his reason suggested, and his experience had confirmed, he again called into exercise for his support, and his faith was again recompensed by receiving his son in a figure once more from the dead, when, having "stretched forth his hand to take the knife," his arm was stayed by a voice from heaven, and Isaac restored to that life which, in all human estimation, was for ever gone. This, notwithstanding the apparent opposition between the promise and the command, is the manner in which his obedience may be rationally explained, nor is it an explanation which rests merely upon the authority and inspiration of St. Paul. It is implied in the very words of Abraham himself when about to fulfil the heavenly command. "Tarry ye here," said he to the young men who accompanied him, "and I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you." These were not idle and unmeaning words, nor was this a moment in which a man so holy would have spoken what he did not feel. They were the true and solemn representations of his thoughts and hopes, and they express, in terms which cannot reasonably be misunderstood, his faith in God's power, and his trust in his will to enable them, after having fulfilled the appointed

sacrifice, to come again unto those they had left. They prove, as clearly as could be expected, that Abraham "accounted that God was able to raise up his son even from the dead," and thus justify both the opinion which has been attributed to him by St. Paul, and his own obedience, in consequence of that opinion, to the divine command.

Such, then, are the reasonings by which we conceive that Abraham may be shown to have acted in wisdom as well as faith, when believing the divine origin of the command he had received, and obeying it even though it was a command to offer up a human victim, the child of promise, and his own only son. The external evidence in its favour was such as in any ordinary case it would have been impossible to resist ; whilst the internal evidence against its fitness was not such as to a faithful and an humble mind would render it impossible to reconcile it to the wisdom and mercy of the Deity. It was exactly, therefore, that species of revelation in which a pious disposition and a rational faith would be justified in allowing the external evidence to preponderate over the difficulties. For difficulties no doubt, with all his piety, and all his faith, Abraham must still have experienced in submitting to an act of obedience so singularly painful and severe ; and strange would it have been had it been otherwise. If the last duty of his long and holy life, if the final trial of his reliance on God's mercy and power, had contained nothing to which the infidel could object, and nothing upon which the believer could hesitate ; if it

had been a command simple in its character, and easy in its performance ; then, assuredly, it would have been most strange had God rewarded his obedience with that solemn renewal of the blessings which we read upon the present occasion. “ The angel of the Lord,” we are told, “ called unto Abraham out of heaven, and said, By myself have I sworn, saith the Lord ; for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, that in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea-shore ; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies : and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed ; because thou hast obeyed my voice.”* Here was a solemn recapitulation of all the promises which Abraham had previously received, and an irrevocable confirmation of them to his posterity ; and that, because he had obeyed God’s voice. It would, therefore, have been still more hard for us to account for the greatness of this reward, had there been no objections or difficulties in obeying the command he had received, than it is now to explain the manner in which those difficulties and objections were overcome by his faith. We should then have wondered at the infinite disproportion between the duty and the recompence. We have now only to wonder at the strength of Abraham’s belief, and to admire, and to imitate his submission to God’s will. Let,

* Gen. xxii. 15, &c.

then, that imitation be displayed by every act, and in every moment of our lives. We have all something upon which our hearts are set. It may be wealth, it may be fame, it may be dignity, it may be the honours of public, or the happiness of domestic, life; and, as God trieth all the sons of men, and those the most severely whom he most strongly loves, it is more than probable, that if, like Abraham, we be indeed the children of faith, like Abraham, too, we shall be called upon to resign that upon which our affections are most firmly fixed. There is, indeed, but one object of love which will never be torn from us, and that is the God and Saviour of the world. There is but one kind of joy and desire which we may indulge without fear, and never indulge too much, and that is the joy and the desire of those heavenly things which we shall never be called upon to sacrifice, and the supply and the love of which will grow and increase in us for evermore. Be it our care, therefore, to walk, like our father Abraham, by faith, and not by sight, and to fix our thoughts and hearts not upon the things which are seen, but upon the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are uncertain and temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal and sure.

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